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VC II





**COLLECTION
OF ANCIENT AND MODERN
BRITISH
NOVELS AND ROMANCES.**

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ZOHRAB

6.2

THE HOSTAGE.

James Justinian
By (D. R.) MORIER,

AUTHOR OF "HAJJI BABA."

Hatred after hatred has been manifested by thee, O Tyrant Chief! and thy secret
rancour has been revealed.

THE POEM OF AMRU, IN THE MOLLA-KAT.



PARIS,

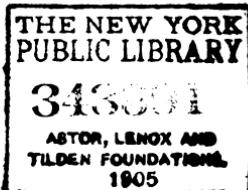
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1833.





NOV 1961
21 JULY
1961

Rev. V. A. Morgan.

PREFACE.

I HAVE often thought that when a jeweller sends home a piece of plate, or some elaborate work of his art, in common honesty he ought to inform his employer how much real gold or silver he has expended in the work, and how much alloy; his purchaser would thus know to a certainty what quantity of the precious metal he possesses, and what he must place to the capricious and uncertain value of fashion and workmanship. So it appears to me, that the author of a book like the present, in which history and fiction are combined, is bound to inform the reader how much of each is placed before him; the historical facts would thus be preserved, whilst the fiction might be thrown away, after the object of amusement had been attained, or the table-talk of the day had evaporated.

IN this book, I confess that the quantum of history is very small indeed in proportion to the fiction. It may be compared to the small canal by means of which, in the East, water is made to meander through a cultivated field, fertilizing the tract through which it passes, but without which it would be barren and without value.

MY hero and heroine are fictitious,* but my tyrannical king belongs to history. No one who has ever visited Persia can forget the many stories which all ranks, from the prince to the mule-driver, are so ready to relate of the famous Aga Mohamed Shah, famous for his cruelty, his wisdom, and his wars. From

* Amena, Amema, or Amima, was the name of Mohamed's mother. Zohrab is a name well known in Persian history.

the coasts of the Persian Gulf to Shiraz—from Shiraz to Ispahan and Tehran—from Tehran to Tabriz, and to the very heart of Georgia, the history of Aga Mohamed is known and repeated. There are many, no doubt, still alive who can even now tremble at the recollection of his name, and can still feel a certain sensation in the region of the neck when they call to mind the ominous aspect of his ferocious countenance.

If those who conceive that the character which I have endeavoured to draw of the tyrant is overcharged and improbable, will give themselves the trouble to turn to the reign of Aga Mohamed, in the History of Persia,* I am sure they will allow, from the facts there recorded, that I have safely kept within the confines of truth. In the narrative of the siege of Kerman, in particular, where the enormities of his cruelty are described, and which I have had in view in my imaginary attack upon Asterabad, they will find such horrors recorded, as will throw those which I attempt to describe far into the shade. But it has not been my object to draw a miniature picture of his character; I have only attempted a sketch. He is my prototype, and I have placed him in my narrative, as a painter sometimes inserts a dragon, or some such monster, in the foreground of his landscape. Many true and characteristic anecdotes of this extraordinary person might have been introduced; but I found that, like bolts driven into a wheel, which while they strengthen make it heavy, such additions, though they might have given more truth, would have encumbered the progress of my story, and embarrassed the scheme which I had planned.

Aga Mohamed deprived one of his brothers of his eyesight, and murdered a second. The history of him whom I have called Hussein Küli, has a slight reference to the fate of both these unfortunate men.

The Prince Fatteh Ali, who is supposed to be the present king of Persia, the Vizir Hajji Ibrahim, the slave Sadek, belong to history; but the humpbacked barber, the ardent Zulma, the officious Sir Khan, Zaul Khan, the Asterabidis and Turcomans, and others, have been created to serve the purposes of my tale. The anecdote of the Shah and the bloody handkerchief, in the first volume, and that of counting the eyes with the handle of his whip in the third, among others, were related to me by credible witnesses. The mode of the Shah's death is historical—the details, fiction.

* See Sir John Malcolm's History of Persia, vol. ii. 8vo. edition.

It would be tedious, and indeed unnecessary, to define where history ends and fiction begins, in the different turns and windings which the thread of my narrative takes; and perhaps it will be sufficient to say, that my object has been to place before the reader a succession of personages, whose manner of speech, whose thoughts and actions, and general deportment, are illustrative of Persia and the East; and I have thought it right to preserve oriental idioms whenever it suited my purpose, although perhaps, in so doing, I transgress against grammatical propriety, particularly when transitions are made from the first to the third person in the same sentence; but in all which I have endeavoured never to lose sight of the precept—

*“Respicere exemplar vitæ morumque jubebo
Doctum imitatorem, et vivas hinc ducere voces.”*

Although it may be urged that such characters as my hero and heroine are not known in Persia, yet let me say that there is no good reason why they should not. It has been remarked that the principles which actuate them are not likely to be produced by the doctrines of the Koran; but we often see in the votaries of a false religion an excellence, however produced, which seems to be guided by the true one. Let me ask those who have lived in the East, and particularly in Turkey, whether they have not been acquainted with Mohamedans there, whose conduct in life would have done credit to Christianity?

We are told,—Either follow tradition, or invent such fables as are consistent with themselves:

“Aut famam sequere, aut sibi convenientia finge.”

I have endeavoured so to do; and this must be my best answer to those who probably will condemn incongruities, and insist upon historical accuracy, not reflecting that I do not pretend to the dignity of an historian, and at most lay claim to the humbler character of an inventor of fables.

THE AUTHOR.



ZOHRAB.

CHAPTER I.

Then the frogs had an ugly king, but what could they do?

LOCMAN.

THE Sun, about to renew its annual ceremony of entering Aries, and giving a new year to Persia, had already acquired considerable power, which began to be sensibly felt in the close atmosphere of Tehran. The stillness of the morning had been broken by the cry of the muezzins from the mosques to announce the morning prayer at break of day, when Sadek, a Georgian slave, sleeping in an anteroom, in attendance upon the tyrant of Persia, started from a broken slumber, and awoke in the greatest alarm. He filled the post of chief valet, and with Hashim his deputy occupied a small room adjacent to the saloon in which his master himself reposed.

The Shah had taken up his abode in one of the principal *imarehs*, an octagonal building situated in the centre of a vast shrubbery, laid out in extensive walks, planted with waving poplars and majestic chenar trees, and kept in constant freshness by fountains, the splashings of whose waters, unceasing and unvaried, were great promoters of that sedate and contemplative mood, in general so prized by oriental nations. Such was the arrangement whenever the royal couch was not spread within the harem; for there women and their guardians were his protectors; but as the winter passed away, the warmer

apartments were forsaken for some house within the precincts of the palace, the insulated situation of which was more open to the breeze.

During the still hours of night no sound was heard save the distant challenge of the sentinels in the towers of the ark, and at the intervals prescribed by the Mohamedan law the solemn cry from the minarets, at once the confession of the mussulman's faith and the signal for his orisons. In the daytime the notes of thousands of birds, and principally that of the indefatigable *bulbul*, each at their stated time delighted the ear, whilst ever and anon the peacock, of which many ranged throughout the palace grounds, threw out its wild and discordant cries. At intervals between the walks, intersecting each other at various angles, were seen condensed plantations of rose-trees, which, when in full flower, so highly embalmed the air that their influence was felt all over the seraglio, and, as the court poet of the day said, "intoxicated the senses, and made the heart drunk." For this reason this enchanting spot was called the *Gulistan*, or the Rose Garden.

The building itself was admirably adapted for coolness and repose. It was open on all sides by doors and casements, which could be closed at pleasure. In the centre was a large saloon of singular construction, containing within its vast dimensions retiring corners, where the occupant might enjoy the passing breeze from whatever point it chanced to blow, and was surmounted by a lofty cupola, highly ornamented with arabesques, its walls being painted with traits of history, descriptive of the Shah's own exploits.

It was here that the ruler of the great empire of Persia, we will not say reposed, but sought repose, against the horrors of a mind at enmity with all mankind, and at variance with itself. His slumbers, like the flickerings of an unsubdued flame, were broken and irregular; during their short intervals, brief exclamations would come from his lips, indicative of the inward warning of his heart. When awake, his aspect, like the adjacent heights of Albors, almost ever darkened by clouds, seemed to forebode storm; and there was truth in the remark, that his smile was as much the forerunner of disaster as his frown was of death.

Will it then be thought extraordinary that Sadek, whose

duty was to watch and not to sleep, should have started with dismay at finding that he might have transgressed? His first impulse was to sit upright in his bed, and then, scarcely permitting himself to draw breath, to give an anxious ear towards the Shah's chamber. Having satisfied himself that all was right, his next care was to awaken Hashim, who had been long taking full advantage of his turn to sleep; which having accomplished in the quietest manner, he invited him to leave his bed, in order that they might seat themselves upon the steps which led into the shrubbery, and thus be at sufficient liberty to talk without being heard, yet still near enough the royal person to catch the least indication of his stirring.

Sadek was a steady-looking man, of a serious and determined countenance, strongly marked by anxiety, and by the despair of ever exactly making his actions suit the wayward and suspicious disposition of the extraordinary character upon whom he waited. He had ever been a faithful adherent to the Shah and his family, and with proper treatment would have remained firm in his fidelity until death; but as he detested injustice, so he deplored the cruelty of his master's mind; and although he could put up with his passion when himself a sufferer, yet he could not countenance it when it fell heavily upon others. His resolution was equal to any danger. So long as he felt that intentions towards him were kind, he was devotedly passive; but whenever he knew the contrary, he became a most dangerous enemy.

Hashim was a much younger man, for the down had scarcely begun to show itself upon his cheeks; whereas a thick and characteristic beard completed the manly cast of Sadek's face. The disposition of the youth, too, was to be formed. At present it was light and thoughtless. Although he trembled as he stood before the tyrant, (for what mortal could do otherwise?) yet when left to himself he had no cares, and only seemed to enjoy the present moment.

"Do tell me," said Sadek, looking to the east, "tell me, Hashim, whether that be the dawn or the false dawn? If it be the false, we are safe; but if the real, our ears are not worth two ghaz the pair. You know the Shah hunts to-day, and we are ordered to awaken him an hour before the dawn. What is to be done?"

"I can't distinguish one dawn from another," said Hashim; "you are more of a weather-gazer than I, and therefore ought to know. All I wish is, that the dawns were in *jehanum* (hell), and that you had let me sleep on."

"Sleep on!" exclaimed Sadek; "to sleep on were to sleep to eternity. You ass, or worse than ass; for an ass sees a precipice when he comes to the brink, and starts; whereas you would fall straightway down it with your eyes open. Go up to yonder terrace, youngster! look well towards the peak of Demawend, and tell me whether you see day-light appearing. Go, and return immediately!"

Hashim did as he was told, and came back, saying that no particular light was visible on the horizon, but that lights were seen in the quadrangle of the palace in which the Khajeh Bashi, the chief eunuch, resided; and that he heard the inhabitants thereof awake and stirring."

"Ahi!" said Sadek, "this hunting excursion will take up several days, since the lady Amima is to be of the party: it behoves the Khajeh Bashi to see that she be properly attended, else his ugly head will pay for it. She and the humpbacked barber are the only two things in this world that the Shah seems to care for."

"And don't you add too his chief executioner?" remarked Hashim. "I should be sorry to fall into that tiger's clutches."

Here they were suddenly stopped by some indistinct sounds which issued from the King's apartment.

"The lion is awake!" exclaimed Sadek, in a whisper; "hist!"

He stepped to the door, and gently lifting up the silken curtain which hung over it, waiting there for a minute in an attitude of suspense, he returned, saying, "He was only making one of his usual starts; he sleeps on: but something must be done. Go, Hashim, to Ismael Khan, who heads the guard at the hall of audience entrance, and inquire how much it wants to the 'first call of morning.' You can't mistake him; for he sleeps with his bed-head placed against the threshold of the wicket gate."

Hashim returned with the intelligence that the guard were already on foot, and that Ismael Khan had told him that it wanted about an hour to the break of day.

Just as he had said this, a loud, shrill, and querulous voice, such as a phantom might be imagined to utter, if the unearthly

had ever spoken, was heard in the apartment, vociferating, “*Ahi bacha! ahi pedersukhteh.* Ye children of grilling fathers! come! appear!”

Although accustomed to this sort of salutation, yet the blood forsook the faces of the two attendants, and their hearts leaped into their mouths, at being thus forestalled in the performance of their duty. Sadek immediately quitting his slippers entered the apartment, and making his lowest obeisance, stood before the Shah, who was already sitting upright on his couch preparatory to rising.

“At length you are pleased to come, are you, you sleeping varlet! The Shah and his empire might have been lost for what you cared, provided you enjoyed your sleep to its very dregs,” said the king to his slave.

“May I be your sacrifice!” exclaimed Sadek, “but I was this moment about to stand before the asylum of the universe. Your humble slave has been watching the dawn for this hour past.”

“A churl like you, who lives without a care, save what food and sleep require, to talk of the dawn!” exclaimed the Shah; “whilst you go on thus, you will scarcely be able to distinguish a mule from an ass by daylight, much less a grey horse from a white one in the dark.* Go, call the humpback,” continued he, “and order the chief astrologer to be in waiting. Bid the Khajeh Bashi, the grand huntmaster, and the master of the horse, to be in attendance.”

Before Sadek left the room to execute this order, he lifted his master from his couch which was spread on the carpeted floor, by placing his hand under the armpit; and now that we have him fairly upon his legs, the reader will perhaps be curious to become more intimately acquainted with the person of the extraordinary being who will form one of the principal features of the following narrative.

Nature, in forming Aga Mohamed Shah, intended to have installed a mind of uncommon vigour into a body capable of seconding its energies, by making it full of activity and strength; but the whole scheme was frustrated by the cruelty of man. Whilst the sharpness of intellect was preserved, it became

* The Persian mode of distinguishing dawn from daylight.

diseased with ill-humour and moroseness, for every time that his body became an object of contemplation, he entertained such disgust towards himself that the feeling finished by placing him at enmity with all mankind. His person, which would otherwise have been tall and erect, was now bent with the curve of apparent age : what would have been strength of muscle and breadth of shoulder, seemed blighted and shrivelled. His face, particularly in a country where beards are universally worn, appeared like a blotch of leprosy, for it was almost totally hairless,—it could only boast of a few straggling bristles, which here and there sprouted at irregular distances, like stunted trees upon a poor soil. The skin which covered it resembled wetted parchment, hanging in baggy furrows down the cheeks, under the chin and about the neck. This spectral countenance, for so it might be called, was, however, lighted up by a pair of small grey eyes of more than human lustre, which, from under two ragged curtains of eyelids, flashed all their intelligence abroad, and as they expressed rage, jealousy, or cruelty, made those who were exposed to their fire feel as if they were under the fascination of some blood-seeking monster. But with all this there were moments when this face would smile, and would even relax into looks of pity and benevolence; but so treacherous were these symptoms esteemed, that at length they were only looked upon as signals of some extraordinary disaster, or as beacons to warn those in danger to be upon their guard.

The Shah had scarcely dismissed his attendant, before the humpback glided into the apartment, bearing in his hand the silver basin, the towels, and all the apparatus for shaving. There was in the appearance of this being something so mysterious, and at the same time so hideous, that it was generally supposed the Shah had selected him for his important office, in order to keep himself in good humour with his own deformities. His immense head, placed in a snug nook between his high shoulders and a protecting hump behind, supported on a pair of slender legs, and accompanied by arms and hands of immense length and strength, put one in mind of an ill-conditioned scarecrow. The expression of his face was scarcely human—heavy eyelids giving protection to a flashing eyeball ; lips of the ape overshadowed by a profusion of hair ; and a

cunning and malignancy of smile which made the skin to creep and the heart to loathe.

He went doggedly about his work, like one much at his ease though full of design,—it was the ichneumon waiting upon the crocodile. Being a sort of privileged attendant, he was the depositary of many of his master's secret thoughts, the instrument of many of his acts of tyranny, and was therefore hated as a spy, and dreaded as an informer.

The barber took possession of his master's head as a commodity peculiarly his own, washed it, shaved it, and trimmed it with a dexterity and courage, considering to whom it belonged, which none but a being of his audacity could have ventured upon. Few words passed between them, but such as were spoken were full of import, and characteristic of the terms upon which they were.

“Baba Khan goes to-morrow,” said the Shah.

“As I am your sacrifice, yes,” said the humpback, “he goes.”

“There is no harm in that boy,” said the king.

“No, none, now,” answered the barber in a suppressed croak, laying some stress on *now*.

“And why *now*?” said the Shah.

“He will soon feel that he is to be a king,” said the humpback, “and that makes a difference.”

“By the head of the Shah!” said the king, stopping the barber's hand, “let him keep his eyes open; I allow none to be ambitious but myself in my kingdom. What crooked thoughts are passing in thy crooked carcase?”

“Your slave spoke of those around him. The meat may be wholesome, but the garnish poison.”

“You must keep watch upon those who surround him,” said the Shah, after a moment's thought; “I must know who and what they are.”

“Upon my eyes be it!” said the humpback; “there is one, however, of whom none but the Shah can speak.”

“What words are these?” said the king; “who is that?”

“He has a sister,” said the malignant imp.

“Hold your impious tongue, scoundrel!” exclaimed the monarch. “Let none speak of the lady Amima unless with that

respect due to the only thing which the king loves upon earth.
The dust of her feet is collyrium for my eyes."

The imp cast a sidelong look of malice at his master, and having finished his operation, he stood before the king in an attitude of humility.

"May I be your sacrifice!—it is done. Am I dismissed?"—

"Yes: see that all things be in readiness for a week's absence. Let the chief astrologer come, and tell him that I mount my horse in an hour, and that the stars must be in readiness."

As soon as the humpback had taken his departure, and the king, with the assistance of Sadek, had dressed himself in his riding costume, he seated himself at the open window, where at a distance, by the side of the marble basin of water, stood the officers whom he had ordered to be in attendance.

To the Khajeh Bashi he said, as with trepidation that officer made the lowest inclination of the body, "Let the Banou (for so he called his niece) depart immediately; she may either go on horseback or in *takhteravan*;—but, mark you, it is upon your head that the corook * be of the strictest, from here onwards towards Firouzkoh, and to twenty parasangs round that place; death, instant death, will be the reward of the wretch who crosses the path of my house. Go!"

Of the chief astrologer he inquired—"Have you a fortunate hour on your astrolabe? Have we permission to leave our capital to-day?"

"May I be your sacrifice!" said the star-gazer; "the fortune of our king, upon whom be blessings and peace, is always on the rise. At one hour, less five minutes, after the morning prayer, the foot of activity must be placed in the stirrup of accomplishment; and just at the full hour, the hoofs of the royal steed must strike on the threshold of the imperial gate."

"Well, well!" said the Shah, you have used your sciencee to good purpose. Go—you have whitened your face this morning."

To the master of the horse he said—"What horse do we ride to-day?"

"Your slave," said the khan, "has prepared for the blessed person of the king of kings the ambling *Murwari*, or pearl,

* When the Shah's women leave the palace, a public injunction, called the *Corook*, is made, that no one be seen on their path on pain of death.

with the turquoise furniture, for the beginning of the journey, and then *Ser-mest*, or drunkard, when your Majesty comes to the hunting ground."

"There is no harm in that," said the king; "be it so;—you are a good servant! Collect the gholams, and let the whole equipage be at the gate."

"Where does the Shah hunt to-day?" said the king to the chief huntsman, who was a stout rough man, weather-beaten withal, with a fine bold countenance. "Where shall we break cover?"

"I have to represent," said the old sportsman, "if the king orders the greyhounds to be taken into the plain after we have passed the *Teng* or narrow pass, among the low bushes we shall find abundance of hares. Beyond that, striking into the mountains of the left, there are rumours of some two or three *gour kurb* (wild asses) having been seen, and if the Shah sees no impediment your slave will place relays of dogs at the proper stations, and thus we may bring one down; for, may their homes be ruined! they are the wariest of all beasts, and as for their speed, we must trust in God and our horses if we hope to overtake them. What else shall I venture to say? Praise be to God! a marksman, with a single ball from off his horse, like unto our Shah, man has never seen; and with the blessing of the Prophet, we may by luck get one of the unsainted beasts."

"And make a good kabob of him, eh?" said the Shah, smiling.

"Inshallah! Inshallah!" exclaimed all the attendants.

"Go, go," said his majesty, "you are a man of wisdom; so be it! But mark; see that my Georgian gun be in order. After all, the true Lesgui gun is the best. As for your European guns, they are worse than nothing; they have no weight; they are made for children, not men."

"Upon my eyes be it!" said the chief huntsman, and took his leave.

To the tent-pitcher the Shah then addressed himself.

"The Shah sleeps at Bagh Shah to-night; at Firouzkoh the next. Let the tents of the harem be pitched immediately in the inclosed valley of Savachi; let the running stream flow through the pavilion of the lady Banou; let a garden be made; let fountains play, and let the reservoir be decorated with fruits

and flowers. But, as you regard your head, let none but the chosen servants of the *khelwet*, or secret apartments, be near at hand, and let the guards be placed at the avenues of the rocky passages. See that all be in readiness. Go! the Shah never speaks twice."

Having dismissed his officers, the king arose to prepare for his morning devotions, of the whole of which he was ever a scupulous observer, although it was remarked of him, that his greatest acts of cruelty generally succeeded their performance. He first washed his feet, hands and arms, and crown of his head, then repaired to the praying carpet, which, together with the bit of sacred clay, his koran, and his comb, were spread for him in the corner of the room, in the direction of Mecca. Here, with an audible voice, his hands uplifted behind his ears, this dreaded despot began the celebrated Fatheh, which all mussulmans look upon as the most perfect form of prayer, and in the repetition of which they daily announce and re-establish their faith in their Prophet. He then went through every genuflection, every inclination, and every salutation of the sacred clay of Mecca, with the most scrupulous precision, whilst Sadek and Hashim remained in attendance on the outside of the apartment in breathless suspense.

As soon as the prayer was over, and having gone through the ceremony (for it could be nothing else) of combing the two or three straggling hairs that grew on his upper lip, or wandered about in solitude on the surface of his bony chin, he called aloud to his servants that his breakfast might be served. This was done in a simple, unostentatious, though costly manner, the dishes, trays, and covers being of massive gold, whilst the smaller cups were of the finest china. Sadek on one knee placed the *khonchahs* before his royal master, the whole having been previously uncovered by breaking the seal of the chief cook, who had tasted the whole, and prononnced it fit for the royal palate—in other words, that it contained no poison.

Whilst this was performing, a light and elegant figure was seen gliding through the avenues of the garden, dressed from head to foot in a riding costume, his small cap gracefully thrown on the side of his head, an embossed sword by his side, a sparkling diamond-hilted dagger in his girdle, and an enamelled-handled whip of many thongs dangling at his wrist. His face

was beautiful ; the nose strongly arched ; his eyes large, black, and full of fire ; the expression of his smile quite enchanting, and his whole appearance full of animated youth, spirit, and grace. This was Fatteh Ali Mirza,* the despot's nephew, and proclaimed successor to his throne.

The birds were all alive and at their morning carols, filling the grove with animated sounds and chirpings, and the sun was preparing to rise through the cloudless sky, when this beautiful youth stopped on the brink of the marble basin, and made his obeisance to his uncle, bending his head negligently forward, whilst his right hand rested on his girdle.

The king ate on, without paying the least attention to his youthful visiter, plunging his hand, apparently with good appetite, into the heaps of snow-white rice that were placed before him, and making his selection occasionally from the savoury smaller dishes which usually accompany a Persian breakfast. At length, having nearly satisfied himself, and turning his head towards his nephew, he drawled out, with a half tone of approbation, "It is you, is it?"

"I am your sacrifice," exclaimed the youth : "I am come to wish you good fortune in your day's hunt, and to seek your permission that I be one of your *gholams* (esclaves) to-day?"

"Be it so," said the monarch ; "but recollect, to-morrow you are dismissed from the presence, and you proceed to your government. Fars and the shores of our southern empire require the presence of an active chief. You are young, boy ! your beard has scarcely sprouted ; but you are now called upon to be of use to the state. But open your eyes, Baba Khan ! if the Shah hears complaints from his rayats and peasantry, you will find him seated on your muznud at Shiraz, before you can twist those ringlets of yours. Hunt to-day, nevertheless ; but be ready for my dismissal and your journey ere the day dawns to-morrow."

Upon this, with the same graceful inclination of the head, the young Prince retreated ; and with a blithe air and tripping step he left the presence of his uncle, to prepare himself and equipages for the day's sport, and for his subsequent journey. When he had left the presence, a graver personage was seen making

* From his youth he was known by the name of Baba Khan, an epithet of endearment given to him in the harem, although Fatteh Ali was his real name.

his selam at a distance, as soon as he had caught a glimpse of the royal person, clad in his dress of ceremony, shawl round his cap, brocade cloak and stockings of red cloth to his feet. This was the Sadr Azem, or the Grand Vizir, the most profound statesman, after his master, whom the East had known for centuries, who knew how far to go, and where to stop, both in language and proceedings, in the direction of the difficult and wayward character of his master.

Hajji Ibrahim Khan, or "the Hajji" simply, as he was known throughout Persia, was in fact a man of the most humane, beneficent, and noble nature, and his great aim was to temper the violence and cruel disposition of his master, by every counteracting scheme which lay in his power; at the same time to turn into proper channels for the glory and welfare of his country, the activity, the energy, the skill, and undaunted bravery of the strange mortal whom his country now called their king.

The Vizir was about making his usual prostration at the margin of the marble basin, when the king, as far as his naturally querulous voice would allow him, exclaimed good-humouredly, "Come near, Hajji, come near; we appoint you our Vekeel during the following week that we hunt. I take Mirza Sheffi with me, who will communicate with you upon affairs of state."

To this, the Vizir made an inclination of the head, and said, "I am your Majesty's slave. My eye shall not slumber, nor my ear be shut, in order that the welfare of your Majesty's kingdom may advance."

"Are the requisite firmans for Baba Khan written?" said the Shah.

"All is ready for him; we have announced that he is allowed to wear the royal *jika* on a *Kai Kaous* crown and *bazubends*—that was I believe the kalaat,* as I am your sacrifice, with which your Majesty has invested him?"

"Yes," said the king, "all that is very right: but what is of more importance, your nephew goes as his Vizir, and it is upon his wisdom we mainly depend. Baba Khan is young, and dress and frivolity will take up his thoughts, whilst the graver matters of state must be instilled into him by your relation. The whole

* Kalaat, a dress of honour.

arrangement is in your hands, Hajji : if all goes right, it will be your merit, but if otherwise, the consequences be upon your head."

Having dismissed the Vizir, he now completed his hunting attire, putting on his shalwars or riding trowsers, binding his legs with proper bandages, and throwing over all his heavy bulgar boots. Then girding his sword by his side, the chief astrologer came in to say, that the hour for departure was near at hand, and the king issued forth from his apartment. As he passed from the door of his inner retreat, to the public parts of the palace, the cry of "*Gitchin*" was heard to resound from the mouths of the heralds, and repeated throughout the whole building, when all the officers, from the Vizir to the meanest groom, were seen hastening away in the greatest anxiety to their appointed posts.

CHAPTER II.

Cares sprout with the beard.

PERSIAN PROVERB.

In the very grey of the morning, before objects could be well distinguished at fifty yards distance, when the shades of the high towers and turreted walls were alone enough to hide whatever might be at their base, a procession was seen to issue from the lofty porticoes of the royal Palace of Tehran. The principal object consisted of a richly equipped takhteravan, mysteriously curtained over with crimson cloth, embroidered in all its compartments with the royal insignia of Persia (the sun rising behind the back of a lion couchant), which covered a frame of gilded lattice-work. It was borne between two richly caparisoned mules, whose housing of red cloth covered them almost entirely, whilst tassels of various colours hung about their heads. Other mules equally caparisoned were in attendance, that they might be exchanged at pleasure, and so

steady were the paces into which they had been trained, that they travelled for days together without breaking into a trot. The litter was spread with the softest mattresses and cushions, that no accidental jolt might discompose the person within, and the great care which was shown in properly conducting it over the most easy paths, disclosed how important it was thought that the occupant should be treated with the highest consideration. This conveyance was closely surrounded by several women on horseback, some clad in crimson cloth cloaks, having the privilege of exposing their faces—for such is allowed to ladies of the royal household—and others clothed from head to foot in impenetrable veils of white muslin. Some three or four led horses, richly caparisoned, were marshalled at a certain distance in front, whilst mules bearing rich yakdans or trunks were seen hastening onwards, distant from the line of march, the whole being marshalled by the royal eunuchs, who with loud shrill voices, and angry words and gestures, were casting about the eyes of watchfulness and suspicion, in order to discover any audacious trespasser who might have transgressed the awful corook. The whole was closed by the person of the Khajeh Bashi, or eunuch in chief, and a numerous suite, who were ready at the smallest signal to scour the country, and inflict immediate death on any unfortunate offender.

The mysterious individual who occupied the litter was no less a personage than the Princess Amima, niece of the king, whose charms we must for the present keep veiled from our reader, as they were in reality from all mortals, until they must of necessity be disclosed to him; and in the mean while we must allow the passage of the procession to produce that effect upon the country where the corook was proclaimed, which it always did, namely, fear and curiosity. How every man's heart beat with desire, as the confused tread of the procession passed his gate! his imagination conjuring up to him, in the very name of the Banou, charms which none but a Houri of Paradise could possess! But again, it sank when he reflected how near he was to death, should his curiosity prompt him to protrude even the tip of his moustache through the chink of his fast-closed shutter, to steal a look! And when the procession issued into the open country, instead of passing through an industrious peasantry enlivening the fields, this awful order produced an untenanted

wilderness ; for even if one unlucky wight was seen, it was in the act of flying for his life, as if he were pursued by a plague, or fearing the influence of the pestilential simoom.

The old drawbridges creaked, as in succession the procession cleared first the ditch which immediately surrounds the ark, and then that which encircles the town, and having once passed the fortification and got fairly into the sahara or plain, as the day dawned, the individuals who composed it got into better humour ; the women began to talk and to show off their horsemanship, and every thing promised a day of enjoyment, —emancipation from the confinement of the walls of the harem being alone one of the greatest delights which a Persian woman can enjoy.

We will leave this party then, to bend its way towards the Bagh Shah, its resting-place for that night, and turn to where the king himself was making his exit from the public gate and avenues of the palace and city.

No sooner had the cry of "gitchin" been heard throughout the Ark, than the commotion was general. The train of led horses, each with their respective grooms, were collected in front of the palace; the running footmen were in attendance ; all the gang of pipe-trimmers, shoe-bearers, cloak-bearers, spear-carriers, and the innumerable tribe of minor officers and courtiers attendant on the court, were there. Then the mounted guard of gholams, consisting of young men of rank equipped in the most gallant style and mounted on the most magnificent horses, either Arabian or Turcoman, were collected in a body. In another place were the Mirzas and men of the pen who composed the king's travelling secretary of state's office, whilst the heralds and chief executioner's officers were seen in all parts marshalling the procession, keeping the crowd at a distance, and opening the avenues through which the brilliant cortege was to pass. The hunting equipages had already proceeded under the superintendence of the huntsmen and dog-keepers, whilst some of the most famous hawks were kept in attendance, perched upon the wrist of their respective keepers, hoodwinked and noosed, as they were occasionally called for and admired by the king, who was particularly fond of the sport which they afforded.

It would be difficult perhaps to give an adequate idea of the

congregated mass that was in readiness awaiting the presence of the king. It wore an appearance partaking more of the character of a military expedition than one purely for pleasure; particularly as in the collected crowd were to be seen a body of two hundred camels, called *Zamburek*, each bearing a small swivel gun on its back, to be fired as the royal foot touched the royal stirrup. Indeed the king was always anxious to keep up a military spirit among his people, and he never stirred without being surrounded by every emblem of that state, always showing himself ready, on the very first emergency, to march to any given point in the vast empire over which he governed.

The Shah having left his inner apartments, proceeded through ranks of musqueteers to the principal gate of the palace, where his horse was in readiness. He walked with a slow and solemn step, receiving the salutations of every one on his passage, until he came to a lane formed by the vizirs, the great secretaries of state, the chief executioner, the governor of the city, the chief mollah, with a congregation of priests, and a great body of courtiers, who all showed by their looks of profound respect the awe in which they stood of the dreaded mortal who was passing before them. It is impossible to describe the expression of the face upon which the eyes of all present were turned, for, bereft as it was of its native manliness, all that could be read in it was distrust, envy, and hatred. He stopped to give his last order to the Grand Vizir, and then turning to his nephew, who had joined him, he ordered him to mount. As he approached his own horse, he found the astrologer royal ready with his watch to give him the true time for touching his foot with the stirrup, and then by the assistance of his Shatir Bashi, who placed his hand under his arm, he vaulted into the saddle. At that moment, the discharge of the two hundred swivels from the camel artillery was heard, the great band of the nokara, consisting of drums and cymbals and hautbois, began to play, and there was a shout of laudatory exclamations and prayers from those around.

As the king advanced, every thing immediately was put into motion, and gradually the condensed mass of men and animals, which completely filled and encumbered the great square before the palace, melted away, and was seen winding onwards, in one long interminable line, through the plain towards the eastern

mountains. The great stirring cause, the one object, the Shah, in short, was to be seen distinctly separate from the great mass, a speck on the plain, infusing dread and apprehension in every eye that ventured to look at him. The heralds opened the procession. Then came the yedeks, or led horses—the choicest of their species, the pride of Arabia and Turcomania, caparisoned in the most beautiful manner, each caparison consisting of distinct sets of precious stones. To these succeeded a band of officers of etiquette, headed by the principal master of the ceremonies, who received petitions, or heard whatever suppliants might have to say, and then reported to the king in person. After this followed a suite of fantastically dressed shatirs, or running-footmen, two by two, each swinging a small stick in his hand, and distinguished by their light and agile persons. The head of these, an officer of considerable importance, walked close to the king's stirrup; whilst the king himself, otherwise totally unsurrounded, seemed to retain his exclusiveness from all the rest of God's creatures. The great mass of the procession was situated behind the person of the king; in front rode the prince Fatteh Ali, conspicuous by the ease and grace of his person, his magnificent costume, the brilliancy of his arms, and unrivalled beauty of his horse. Then came the Mastofis, or secretaries—the king's story-teller—his principal singer—numerous servants—and, last of all, a dense body of his gholams, or body-guard, all mounted on horses picked from the best of Persia's breed.

This procession held good until it had advanced about a parasang from the walls of the city, when some returned, and others proceeded straight to the halting-place at night; whilst the king, accompanied by his hunting equipage alone, took the direction of the appointed sporting country.

On passing a limb of the chain of hills which takes its direction from the great cone of Demawend, the sportsmen entered upon a small plain, in the immediate entrance of which the chief huntsman had taken post with his dogs, and as the royal procession advanced he flung himself from his horse, and making the usual low inclination of the body, gave the information he had acquired concerning the game. He proposed first to pass an hour of the morning in hawking the red-legged partridge among the rocky crests of the hills; and, as the sun acquired

strength, to seek the wild ass deeper in the recesses of the mountains, where he had posted several relays of dogs, entrusted to the care of experienced peasants.

This being acceded to, the Shah immediately called for his favourite hawk, a native of the *germeseer*, or hot countries, which took a post upon the royal wrist, the eye of the animal being almost eclipsed by the superior animation of that of the man. The young prince was allowed to manage and fly a hawk : a favoured few also took possession of hawks, but none dared venture to cross the king's path, or to hazard a flight in his direction. The sport began with the greatest success ; and he who, a few minutes before, was, as it were, stiffened into all the dignity and exclusiveness of Majesty, was now seen throwing himself headlong into the chase with all the eagerness of a schoolboy. The hills and the plain now resounded with cries : in one place was the hawksman, with his head erect, tracing through the air the progress of his bird, which he had just slipped in pursuit of some frightened object of game ; in another, was seen a sportsman, hawk on wrist, riding at the greatest speed of his horse to where he expected a start ; and again, on the pinnacle of some far-away rock, might be discerned the intelligent hawksman calling back his truant-bird by the well-known cry peculiar to him, or waving in the air the decoy, to entice him back to his perch. Through all these different gradations of the sport did the tyrant of Persia pass, during the one or two hours that it lasted ; and when at length his huntsman in chief announced that it was time to seek for nobler sport, he retreated to another horse, which was now in waiting for him ; whilst the gholams were sent in pursuit of the stragglers, to draw them again into their respective places near the royal person.

The young Prince, enlivened with the sport, returned to the Shah with an animated countenance, warmed with the glow of health and freshness, and gave an account of the share he had taken in the diversion. His success had been great ; and, with the unsuspecting confidence of youth, he was summing up the result of his feats, when he was checked by a look of disapprobation from the despot, who, even in such minor acts of prowess, could not endure the smallest competition with himself, either real or imagined.

“Wait, boy !” said the Shah ; “wait until we get into the

mountains. The wild ass is even more daring than the partridge in his excursions, and he will make your young heart leap in your mouth, as he takes you over rocks which no horse can dare to ascend, or by the brink of precipices where no hoof can venture to tread."

Fatteh Ali heard this with no other emotion than the desire of being carried thither, and only grasped the tighter the light and elastic spear, made of the India bamboo, and tipped with the most perfectly worked steel, which he now held in his hand, or looked towards his gun-bearer, to see that the flint and the priming of his rifle were in good order.

Having advanced well into the recesses of the mountains, which reared their rude crests ever and anon into the most fantastic shapes, apparently forbidding the horseman's approach, or appalling his audacity, at length a cry was heard, loud and shrill, repeated from different stations on the rocks, "Goor khur! Goor khur!" "The ass!—the wild ass!" And, sure enough, some two or three of these beautiful and independent animals were seen quietly feeding in the very bottom of a deep ravine, apparently unmindful of their surrounding assailants.—The old chief of the hunt came up in breathless haste, this time regardless of all ceremony, to where the Shah was posted, to inform him of the fact, and to point whither it ought to be their object to drive the game, in order that it might fall in with the different relays of dogs which had been posted in the mountains, and without which it would be in vain to attempt to tire the almost unconquerable activity and bottom of these beasts. The Shah immediately yielded a quick and eager assent, and without loss of time rode in the prescribed direction.

With great wariness and skill, the huntsman got the wind of the game, and then, being within two or three hundred yards of them, slipped from the couples two of the swiftest and strongest greyhounds. The beasts no sooner heard the noise of the hunt than, with head and ears erect, crest up, snorting aloud the nervousness of their activity, they bounded off a few paces—then stopped—then bounded a few more—stopped, and turned front on their pursuers, when, as if disdaining all pursuit, they allowed the dogs to approach within a few yards, and then darted off at a speed which left imagination far behind. Having gained an immense advance, as in derision

of their pursuers, they stopped, and even fed; when the same flight was again repeated, and again terminated with success. It was now that the well-known prowess of the Persian horsemen might be remarked: no ascent, however steep, no descent, however rapid, seemed to stop them, but urging their bold and sure-footed horses over every impediment, they kept way with the dogs, in a manner that no one could believe who had not seen them. Among the foremost of these rode the king himself, with eager eye, in the direction of the chase, bearing in one hand his Georgian gun, and with the other directing his horse, with a quickness and dexterity worthy of a mountain chief. Close to the royal person rode the young prince his nephew, reckless of every danger, only anxious to be foremost, and distressed that he might not precede his uncle. He also had taken his gun in hand, for as the chase had now ascended to the rocky summits, he might have a better chance of bringing down his game with it than with his spear, which could only be used in the plain. The Goors had now been chased by two relays of dogs, and still no symptoms of lassitude or faintness were seen; they had carried their pursuers to the very summit of the most stupendous heights, near to which only some three or four horsemen had ventured to pursue them; the rest either remained behind or were toiling up the rocks and ravines, but still the ground was so disposed, that the whole scene was kept in full view by all the party. A suspension of all exertion seemed to have taken place, when a quadruped was seen to take post on the very apex of a triangular rock, which formed the summit of the highest mountain, cutting the blue sky with its form. At that moment a shot was fired—the animal still kept its post; a second after, another was discharged—and lo! down it fell from its proud height, falling prone into a yawning precipice, and bounding from rock to rock, from projection to projection, until it alighted almost at the very feet of the Shah himself. An universal shout of approbation from a thousand uplifted voices was immediately heard, which resounded in a thousand echoes through the deep recesses of the mountains. But well would it have been for him who fired the shot, who excited the admiration, whose heart bounded with delight, if he had never fired it! It raised a storm that produced immediate effects, and which

threatened to overwhelm him with destruction. The tyrant fired the first shot; the youthful prince the second. As soon as the successful result of it was seen, the envy and rage of the eunuch at once started into active passion. Turning sharp round, with a face beaming with wickedness, he exclaimed, "Who was that? What burnt soul dared to perform thatfeat?" Fatteh Ali, with his head down, his arms just supporting his drooping gun, and altogether deprived of his exultation, confessed himself the culprit by his silence—he said nothing, but trusted to the heedless ardour of his delight, to make his best defence.

But to trust to the generosity of one who had none in his soul was to grasp at a straw. It was well, indeed, that instant death had not been the reward of his temerity; but disgrace, or intended disgrace, was the result. The gallant youth was instantly ordered from the field, and told to proceed at once to the night's resting-place, there to wait the king's further pleasure.

With the excited anger of the tyrant fell his eagerness for the sport. His mind became the prey of every little hate and spite; and he would perhaps have sacrificed the promoter of it to his ill humour, had he possessed any other relative to whom he might look for perpetuating his race, and the dynasty which he might almost be said to have established. He was obliged to swallow his spleen; and as he descended from the mountains, he entered into conversation with some of his surrounding courtiers, who, well knowing the temper and character of the man, managed by their flattering and appropriate speeches to restore him to a better frame of mind. But still the king was not satisfied that the prince his nephew should leave him to take possession of his important government, without receiving some lasting and impressive lesson of the dependence in which he was placed, and of the awful consequences of the smallest deviation from that path which it would be his duty to pursue.

Having reached the encampment at the Bagh Shah, he inquired what had become of the prince, when he was informed that he had some time since reached his own tent; and that he was now passing his evening at a small distance with his youthful companions and servants, firing at a target with ball. Nothing

certainly could have been worse selected than this amusement, at this particular moment; and accordingly the very mention of it brought out the whole of the king's rage. " *Ahi, Bad-bakht!* Oh, the ill-favoured youth," exclaimed he, " when will his folly cease? Is it not enough that he should have bearded me to my nose this very morning? and now he wishes to proclaim my defeat to the whole camp by reminding them at every shot of his victory. Go, bring him here instantly," he exclaimed to his trusty attendant Sadek; " go, take him into my private tent; let no one, on pain of death, be near; but in the mean while send hither the humpback."

Sadek immediately departed in search of the young prince; and the barber stood before his master.

" Place the box under the pillow in the tent of secrecy," said he, to his unearthly-looking domestic.

The imp, seeing the state of things from the contortion on his master's brow, merely said, " *Be cheshm!*" " by my eyes," and took his leave.

The king then leaving his own large tent, where he had been seated since his return from the hunt, went into an adjoining smaller one, which he used for secret conferences, and which would be instant death for any one to approach within hearing distance. Fatteh Ali was in the very act of firing off his last discharge at the target when Sadek approached to request his attendance before the king. His indiscretion then immediately struck him; and ordering his followers to desist from further practice, straightway he proceeded to the interview. The day had now completely closed, and two tapers were about being introduced, when Fatteh Ali stepped in, and there discovered his uncle seated in a corner, not unlike a venomous snake coiled up within itself, ready to dart upon its unsuspecting prey. This face-to-face interview at first staggered him, but conscious of no offence, in all the innocence and confidence of youth, he presented himself as if nothing of importance had occurred.

" Fatteh Ali," said the Shah, in no very agreeable-toned voice, " sit!" This was an unheard-of privilege; however, in obedience he sat down. " Fatteh Ali," repeated the king, with a strangely solemn air, " you are young—you are heedless, 'tis true; but young and heedless as you are, you must be taught that if you once lose respect for those to whom respect is due,

you may in time commit acts of the most reprehensible nature—acts, which if not rebellious, may border on rebellion, and leave me, your lord and master, no other alternative than that one of depriving you of the power of so doing."

"For the love of the Prophet! for the love of Ali!" exclaimed Fatteh Ali, "what words are these? I am your sacrifice, my uncle! Whose dog am I, that should think of rebellion? By your sacred head, by your salt which I have so long eaten, I was carried away by the ardour of the chase in what I did to-day—had I known that you would have been displeased, I would rather have cut my finger off than pulled that ill-fated trigger;—pardon—oh pardon!"

"All this is very well, Fatteh Ali! but before we part, I have something of importance to communicate to you. Prepare yourself for a sight which will require all your fortitude to behold—this is no child's play—the king is in earnest." And saying this, he drew forth a small though strongly-secured box, at which he looked with an expression of malignity and mystery that no pen can describe; and applying a key to the padlock with which it was closed, drew forth a parcel wrapped in a silken handkerchief.

Fatteh Ali expected at least some gem of value, or some curiosity, precious from the manner in which it was preserved. His impatience was excited to the utmost, when wrapper succeeded wrapper, and still nothing appeared that in the least came up to his expectation. It might be a choice Koran, which on his departure his uncle might be anxious to give him, knowing how careful he was to let the world understand that he was a zealous promoter of his religion, and one of the holy Prophet's most devoted sons. But no—the inside package had no appearance of any thing so substantial; or it might possibly be the jika, the ornamented jewel to wear on the head, the ensign of royalty, which now that he was about more closely to represent Majesty in his new government, his uncle might be inclined to give him with his own hands—this too did no appear to be the object of so much care. The Shah paused as he came to the last wrapper. It evidently was no gift—kindness and generosity had nothing to do with the operation—the face of the actor bespoke neither—on the contrary, it bespoke passions of the most angry nature. At length, at one effort, the

Shah pulled off the last covering; but what was the youth's horror and surprise, instead of a splendid gift, to see an old handkerchief clotted with blood displayed before his eyes!

"Do you see this?" said the king, as he deliberately unfolded the abominable rag, his face at the same time taking an expression which would have appalled even a demon. Fatteh Ali, with fixed muscles and blanched cheeks, stared wildly at the horrid exposure.

"Boy," said the king, with increased earnestness, "does not this blood speak?" Fatteh Ali could only answer with looks of astonishment. "Speak, boy," said the tyrant, "do you know this?"

"God forgive me!" he answered, the words almost choking his utterance, "I know nothing of blood!"

"Ill-fated that thou art," exclaimed the Shah, "this blood is the blood of thy father!"

At this a deadly hue overspread the cheeks of the sensitive youth, and a tremor convulsed his frame. "My father!" he exclaimed.

"Ay, thy father," said the despot, "and my brother! He was amiable, like thyself, therefore I loved him; he was thoughtless and heedless like you—I suspected bim; he became ambitious and rebellious, therefore I slew him! There, go!—thou knowest the worst—thou knowest me—remember the night's lesson. Such as I acted towards the father, so will I towards the son. As I treated my brother, so will I my nephew. Go! you are dismissed—ponder deeply on this—and ere to-morrow's dawn be you on your road to Shiraz."

During this speech, this victim of passion had exhibited symptoms of the profoundest feeling. As he described the love he bore his brother, tears, actual tears, sprang from sources which had seldom known such weakness, and gave an indescribable expression of blended softness and harshness to a countenance which long habit had imprinted with nothing but the most uncompromising sternness. But he soon recovered himself—this transient gleam of the truth of nature's feelings was quickly overclouded, and the youth, in looking up at his uncle's face, could discover nothing but its own usual impenetrable gloom. A long silence ensued. The astounded youth swelled with every conflicting emotion; unprepared as he was

for such a disclosure, his whole being appeared to be struck by imbecility : he would have spoken, but words stuck in his throat, and he rose to go ; but so overcome was he by the misery of his situation, he said,

“ And am I thus to leave you, without one soft word ? Recollect I am fatherless—my only hope is in God and you. Amima and I are orphans—we are the creatures of your bounty—we live by your countenance, and are less than the dust of the field, if you deprive us of it ! ”

The appeal to the name of Amima produced a change in the countenance of the eunuch ; but still the excitement which he had just undergone preserved the mastery, and he was no otherwise softened by the humility of his nephew than by saying, “ As long as you behave properly, boy, you will have nothing left to desire from me. The king knows how to reward his servants.”

“ If then your slave is thus to be dismissed, let your nephew ask one favour of his uncle. For the love of the Prophet, let him be permitted to see his sister before he goes. Allow me, for the last time, boy that I still am, to see my Amima before she be for ever excluded from the gaze of man. I am sure in this we can neither transgress against the ordinances of the Prophet, nor the usages of the strictest sons of Islam.”

“ Boy, what do you ask ? ” said the Shah. “ Do not you know, that your sister is the Banou, the chief of my Anderoon ? She should not be allowed to see even her father, much less a madman like you. It cannot be face to face.”

“ Be it then, O my uncle ! behind a curtain ; or let her be veiled. I wish once more to hear the sound of her voice before we part for ever.”

There was evident agitation in the mind of the Shah, at this request of his nephew. His jealousy, that never-failing attendant upon a creature constituted as this man was, had taken fire ; but still, his love for his niece was ardent, and allowing the youth to depart without an interview, and forbidding him any access to her, he was conscious would be a proceeding so afflicting, that he began to fear it might be visited upon himself in bitter upbraiding. He therefore yielded a tardy and unwilling assent to Fatteh Ali’s request, saying that he should immediately be conducted to her dwelling, but that the interview

must take place in the presence of the chief eunuch, who would report all that passed, and that on pain of his displeasure it should not last longer than a certain number of minutes.

Fatteh Ali willingly agreed to any arrangement that might bring him into communication with one he loved so dearly as his sister, and was preparing to leave the presence, when the Shah, calling him close, and with eyes speaking daggers, he said,

" If one word of what you have now seen or heard transpires, know, boy! that instant I am no longer your uncle, and you die."

The youth scarcely knew whether he was awake or asleep at these words ; and bewildered by what had taken place, he mechanically made his accustomed salutation, and took his leave, to wait without the tent until he should be conducted to his sister.

He had not waited long before the Khajeh Bashi came to him, and, preceded by several large lanterns, they took their way to where the royal women were lodged. Every demonstration of respect was paid to the presumed heir apparent : of that there was no lack ; indeed, the difficulty was how to restrain it within proper bounds, so much was it feared to excite the jealousy of the actual king. Fatteh Ali therefore requested to be conducted in the most private manner possible. The harem had been placed within the garden, which is inclosed by high walls, at the gate of which the prince stopped for a short time, until his conductor went in to make some previous arrangement, and then returned.

The prince was introduced into a small room, carpeted with travelling furniture, which communicated with another by a door, over which was suspended a silk curtain. The Khajeh came in after a few minutes' waiting, and making his lowest obeisance, said, pointing to the curtain, " Bismillah ! in the name of God ! the Banou waits." Upon which Fatteh Ali sprang to the spot, and exclaimed with the greatest animation,

" Amima!"

" Are you Fatteh Ali ?" said a most beautiful voice, the silvery tones of which at once went to the heart.

" Are you my own sister ? my Amima ?"

" And you my brother ?"

"Curse on the rapidity of time, which has made me the youth I am, and debarred me of the pleasure of seeing you. Those dear, dear days when we were inseparable companions are gone by, and now we live in the world unknown to each other."

"But not unthought of, Fatteh Ali. Your image is never from my mind. I love you more than ever. But we must submit to the laws, and moreover to the Shah's wish. In thought let us exist for each other; but not otherwise. We are not like the infidels, who allow of the gaze of man on woman."

"Far be it from me, Amima, to think otherwise. But I am about to leave you. We may never meet again. Where will you ever find another brother, if you lose me? and where shall I ever find another sister?"

"Yes, my brother!" exclaimed the beautiful and mysterious voice, "I have heard of your destiny. Let us be resigned to the decrees of God! Allah is great! Allah is merciful! Let us but do our duty, and all will be right. You are now growing to man's estate; your thoughts, your sword, your services, are now due to the king and your country. Your sister, Inshallah! will hear that you are become a personage, and she will ever put up her prayer to the holy Prophet for your safety." The curtain was slightly agitated at these words, as if some one behind it had deeply sighed, and they produced such an effect upon the youth, that he would have sprung forward, and clasped his sister in his arms, but for the presence of the Khajeh, so much did his heart require some mode of expanding his feelings, agitated and worked upon as they had been by what had passed in the king's presence.

"You are my consolation, my hope, my every thing in this world. We are orphans, Amima; we have lost—" He would have said "a father," but he checked himself as he looked towards the Khajeh. "We must never forget each other. And if ever the day should come that Amima should want a protector, let her look to Fatteh Ali. Her commands shall be law. Her enemies shall be his enemies, and her friends his friends."

The Khajeh now hinted that, according to the commands which he had received, the interview must draw to a close; and making his bow to the prince, he withdrew to give directions for the prince's departure. Fatteh Ali seized upon this precious moment with the swiftness of light, he drew the hand to him

which he saw just touching the curtain, and half throwing the hateful skreen from him, he embraced a form whose slight and graceful impress on the yielding silk bespoke every thing that the imagination can conceive of woman's loveliness. This was all he saw of his sister; and as the guardian returned, they had only time to repeat their vows of brotherly and sisterly love, of determinations to write to each other, and of injunctions to watch over each other's safety.

The youth, overwhelmed with feelings of every sort—horror and dread of his uncle, love for his sister; dependent upon his uncle's will, called upon by duty to obey him as their king and benefactor, yet prompted by nature to hate and abhor him as the destroyer of their father, whatever might have been his delinquency,—returned to his tents in no enviable mood; but the feelings of youth, and particularly of a Persian, whose characteristic is volatility, are but transient, and when he turned to his prospects for the future, to his journey on the morrow, which would remove him from his uncle, and give him an independent scene of action, surrounded by every circumstance which could flatter his ambition and give full scope for the prosecution of his tastes, he gradually resumed his liveliness, and prepared for his departure. Indeed, so little inclined to sleep was he, that after having spent some time in conversation with his future vizir and counsellor, he agreed that it would be in every way more expedient to follow the Shah's wishes to the letter, and to take the road towards Shiraz with the least possible delay. Accordingly, immediate departure was determined upon. The tents were unpitched, the baggage was loaded, all the equipages were collected, and before the midnight watch had been set, Fatteh Ali was already on his road. He reached the seat of his government in the due course of time, and there we will leave him to grow up to manhood, until perchance our narrative may bring him before our readers again, with his beard fully grown, and his intellect more expanded. In the mean while, we return to the Shah, and to the main objects of our narrative.

The first words he pronounced upon awaking the next day, were to inquire whether the Prince Fatteh Ali had departed; and when he was informed that the dust of his last string of baggage-mules was but just perceptible on the horizon of the plain, and that ere this he must have reached his first stage, he

seemed pleased, and immediately bestirred himself to enjoy an active day's sport on his road to Firouzkoh, where he intended to pass the ensuing week. The whole camp was in motion at an early hour. The harem took its usual departure before the rest of the court was on the stir; and as the second day's hunt was nearly similar to that which we have already related, without the catastrophe which put an end to it, we will spare our readers any further details upon the subject, and take them, without more delay, to the future scene of our narrative.

CHAPTER III.

Woman, veil thyself!

KORAN.

In a direction about north-east from the city of Tehran, distant some twenty parasangs, is situated the small town, or rather large village, of Firouzkoh. Its site is supposed to occupy that of some ancient city, and the name of Iskender, or Alexander, is mentioned as being the founder of certain buildings evidently of great magnitude, on or about a sort of Acropolis situated near it. But it is more celebrated for being the frontier town to the wooded and forest-girt province of Mazanderan, and for its neighbourhood to passes through certain ridges and belts of rocky mountains, which have been celebrated, both in ancient and modern times, under the name of pylæ or gates.

A chain of these mountains, taking a sweep to the westward, approach Firouzkoh within about three miles, and as they will be the scene of part of our immediate history, will require some more particular description.

The plain on which the village is situated extends itself, with some slight undulations, to the foot of a perpendicular wall, or curtain of rock, that runs in a straight line almost quite across it, and seems to bar any further progress to the traveller in that

direction. Its elevation is so abrupt that one might suppose its almighty Architect intended to exclude man from going further, and to reserve it entirely for the habitation of the antelope and the mountain goat, with which the tract is overrun, were it not for one narrow pass or lane, formed by a perpendicular rent from top to base in the live rock, sufficiently wide for two horsemen to go abreast, and which, after winding about in an uncertain manner some two hundred yards, leads into a basin of narrow dimensions, surrounded on all sides by the same sort of rock. This is again perforated by a similar channel, which is a little broader than the other, but more beautiful; for its sides appear to have been polished and prepared with great skill, although the hand of man has evidently not been employed upon them; whilst a stream of the purest water winds its way through a clean bed, partly rock and partly gravel, creating a fringe of the most refreshing verdure on its banks, and giving to the whole scene an appearance of careful ornamental cultivation. This avenue, which even in the hottest weather is deliciously cool, again leads into a basin similar to the first, excepting in its dimensions, which are considerably larger, the former being, as it were, the anteroom to the latter, which, in its relative proportion, might be called the saloon. From this opening there appears to be no outlet. The rocks rise perpendicularly around, whilst the surface or the flooring, if we may so call it, is composed of a short tufted grass, which bends in crisp elasticity under the tread. No spot was ever better calculated for the purpose to which it was appropriated by the Kings of Persia, namely, as a safe retreat for their harems; where their women, their wives, daughters, and female slaves, might roam about and take the air, without apprehension from the gaze of man, or indeed of any living thing, save the antelopes and wild goats, which constantly, on the very crests of the rocks, peeped their heads over to survey the depths below.

It was in this spot that the Shah had ordered the pavilion of the lady Amima to be erected; and never had a more luxurious combination of wood, canvass, and rich materials been seen in Persia. Its outer walls of crimson stuff, richly embroidered, were spread to a vast extent, enclosing a garden and a basin of water, laid out with great skill and labour. The pavilion itself

was erected on three poles, the fly or roof of which covered a large space, so that constant shade was thrown over the apartment which it contained ; and this was lined with the most beautiful Cashmerian shawls, which had been worked on purpose in the looms of that country ; the sides and walls had been perforated in devices like lace or trellis-work, allowing the smallest breeze free access within. The floor of this apartment, which had been raised some two feet from the level of the ground, was overlaid with carpets of the most beautiful colours and patterns, also manufactured at Cashmere, and presented nothing to the tread of an unshod foot but the softest and thickest wool, whilst thick *nummuds*, or felts, were profusely spread all round for seats. In the corner was a magnificent black velvet pillow, embroidered with small pearls at the two extremities, and terminated by tassels of larger pearls. Immediately before it, a small fountain, refreshing the air, was made to throw up constant streams, the borders of which were ornamented by fresh flowers, and by succession of fruits piled up in bowls.

The day had scarcely dawned, and the east was just lightly tinged with the beautiful crimson peculiar to Persian skies, when a female form was seen making the last prostration of the Mohamedan prayer in one corner of this pavilion, gracefully bending forward to kiss the sacred clay, and then returning to its kneeling position ; whilst another was standing at a small distance in an attitude of solicitude and apparent interest, waiting until this pious act should be over. No pen could ever define the beauty, the bewitching air of innocence and dignity, which pervaded the whole person of the one who prayed. She was fast ripening into womanhood, but her form was almost infantine ; different from the generality of her countrywomen, she was fair—at least she might be so called where all are decidedly dark ; her hair, flowing down her back and over her temples in the greatest profusion, was brown, but rendered auburn by a slight tinge of *khenna* ; her skin was whiter, and of a more delicate texture, than that of the most refined Circassian ; and her eyes were of so dark a blue that they were occasionally taken for the usual black eye of the country, and being deeply set, they possessed a double force of expression. Her movements were full of grace. There was an earnestness in

every thing she said, which enchanted the value of each word, and gave her an appearance of sincerity unusual to her country-women. She was richly though simply dressed, in the costume of spring, that is, chiefly in shawls, which were disposed in folds round her person; whilst rows of buttons, each possessing a stone of value, drew tight to her shape the short but graceful vest which covered her body. Her head-dress was composed of a turban of shawl, of a round and picturesque form, two long tresses, after the fashion of Persia, falling from her temples in rich clusters nearly as low as the swell of her bosom. This fair creature was the Princess Amima, niece of the Shah, and sister to the Prince Fatteh Ali. Possessing an almost unbounded sway over her uncle, she never took advantage of it but for the best of purposes, always tempering her zeal in favour of the unfortunate victims of his rage or ambition, by a wisdom and discretion beyond her years; and which, in fact, was the secret of her influence. She was almost adored as a saint by the whole country, particularly by those who immediately surrounded the person of the monarch; for when any one of them incurred his displeasure, they always had recourse to her good offices, and she seldom failed in restoring them to favour. This young creature, as indeed all Persian girls do, had lived in such total seclusion from the world, that she had never spoken to man save her uncle, her brother, and the attendants of the seraglio, and consequently her heart had never known any stronger emotion of affection than for one or two of her own sex. Her mother had died when she was very young; her father, as we have seen, was said to have fallen a victim to his own ambition, and to the vindictive rage or policy of her uncle; and excepting an old nurse, whom she always called Dehed, and her companion or waiting-maid Mariam, both of whom she loved with the greatest affection, she had no attachments.

It was Mariam who was in the tent, watching her mistress as she prayed. She was about ten years older, and was as dark as her mistress was fair; with strong-marked features, eyes full of fire, arched eyebrows, and hair of raven black. She was sister to Sadek, the Shah's valet, and acted towards her mistress more as companion than as a servant, being the confidant of all her feelings, and a partaker of her joys as well as of her griefs.

Amima, rising from her last prostration, exhibited in her beautiful countenance an expression of the tenderest feeling. "I have thought of nothing but my dear Fatteh Ali," said she to Mariam, "during my prayers. May God be with him, wherever he goes!" said she in a sort of mental exclamation.

Mariam said, "God grant him health and strength, as well for your sake as for that of Persia! A wonderful great king will he make, if he imitates in the smallest degree the virtues of his sister!"

"My soul Mariam," said Amima, "do not throw words into the air! Who am I compared to Fatteh Ali? I do not like flattery: I have told you so a thousand times. Whatever I am, so let me be. I will address myself to Allah, and say with Ferdousi, 'Whatever I am, 'tis thou that hast made me.' But let us not lose the cool of this beautiful morning," said she in a livelier tone; "let us make a survey of this curious and wonderful place; let us take advantage of the liberty which the king has given us, to walk about unaccompanied by our usual guardians, and without the precautions which usually surround us."

"Yes, yes, my Khanum!" exclaimed her attendant. "Oh! let us be as the infidel women are said to be, for the time we are here. 'Tis true there is nothing to look at us, save the wild beasts, who peer at us from the summit of the rocks; but even that is something new."

"You speak of infidel women," said the young princess, "as if you envied the liberty they enjoy. I fear, Mariam, you read your Koran to little purpose. Young as I am, I know that there can be no greater crime than for a woman to show her face to a man; therefore let us take a veil, lest such a misfortune should happen."

Saying this, the two maidens quitted the tent, and bent their steps at random, uncertain as to the direction they would take.

"We are really like mice in a cage," exclaimed Mariam, as she surveyed the rocks which surrounded them. "We might try to get out, but it would be in vain; for, excepting at the entrance on the other side, where the guards are posted, there does not seem to be a hole to put one's head into."

"No," said the Princess, "never was there ever seen a more

complete Anderoon than this; 'tis one of the stupendous works of Allah! See, the rocks rise round us like a *serperdeh*.*

"In truth, yes," said Mariam, "you said it well, my Khanum! But let us walk close at their base; we may find some flower that we have never before seen!" Upon which they took their way near the root of the rocks, admiring their height, and exclaiming at their strange conformation. As they proceeded they came to a small projection, within which they observed a very narrow pass which had been hidden from their view, the rocks lapping over each other like the folds of an Indian skreen, and keeping that hidden which could only be seen by a near approach.

"Wonderful, wonderful!" exclaimed Mariam, "let us go on, my Khanum! let us go this way."—Arhma was lost in admiration at what she saw. The rocks were cleft as if by one blow from some supernatural hand, and so narrow was the passage, that it was scarcely lighted by the dim ray from above which pierced through it.

Without hesitation they proceeded to explore what they at first took for a cavity. As they advanced, the passage continued to wind onwards, until it stopped almost abruptly; but there was a narrow part of the rocks which had been formed by nature, and adopted as a path by the wild goats, into an easy ascent, and which gradually led from the intricacy of the channel into some more open space.

At first the maidens, as shy as the antelopes themselves, seemed uncertain whether they should proceed, but taking courage from the total seclusion of the scene, and impelled by their natural eagerness and curiosity, they ventured to ascend, turning their eyes upwards with looks full of interest towards the perpendicular rocks overhead, which opened new forms to their view at each step they took. As they ascended they found their path bordered with mountain flowers, which, as they gathered, invited them onwards: they now saw more of the blue sky, and at length stepping over a huge rock, which had appeared to overhang their heads from the lowermost point of their path, they at once stood upon an eminence which

* The *serperdeh* is the wall of canvass which surrounds the royal tents.

overlooked an immense range of wild and savage country. In the extreme distance were seen the crests of the forest-trees, which in one deep and impenetrable mass clothed the sides of the mountains that surround the Caspian Sea, and form the boundaries of the province of Mazanderan. A wild intermixture of low wood, rock, soil; and broken country took up the intermediate space, comprising a chase celebrated throughout Persia for the variety of wild animals with which it abounds, and a well-known resort of its kings for the purposes of hunting. The majestic and snow-capped cone of Demawend was seen to the westward, stretching its beautiful lines of ascent into the intervening lines of other surrounding mountains, and gave at once a character of grandeur, to what without it would be a dreary chilling waste. No sound was heard save the shrill note of the hawk, or occasionally high in air the heavy cry of the eagle, which might be seen winding in graceful circles its descent upon its prey. All nature was hushed; the first rays of the sun were darting across the wilderness, touching the angles of abrupt mountains, and tinging with red the snows on the great mountain's cone.

The maidens, who had never before found themselves in so lone and unprotected a situation, remained awe-struck at the view before them, and scarcely ventured to address each other. They appeared to stand alone on the surface of the world. Their beautiful forms, as it were sole tenants of the wilderness, would have made a subject worthy of a painter's skill, backed by the beautiful and dazzling light that was gradually developing every object in the great landscape before them.

Mariam at length found courage to speak. "Let us proceed, in the name of the Prophet! O my Khanum—such a place was never seen before—surely our fortune is great!"

"Stop," exclaimed Amima, with timidity in her accent, "are we right in proceeding thus far? This is beyond our limits."

"Only let us advance to yonder rock," said the confidant, "and then we will retrace our steps. We shall certainly see strange sights from it."

They proceeded cautiously about a hundred yards further to a rock which held a conspicuous place in the foreground, and

which by its projecting top would seem to afford shelter both from the sun as well as the night air. They had scarcely turned an abrupt angle, when they heard, or thought they heard, the growl of a dog. Advancing a few steps, their apprehensions were realized ; for they not only heard the bark distinctly, but saw a dog rise from the ground, where it had been lying, and, almost immediately after, a man's form extended on the ground, apparently asleep. A hawk, hoodwinked, was perched immediately over him.

The first impulse of both the maidens was to make a rapid retreat ; but the bark of the dog having awakened the man, he immediately arose and advanced towards them. There was now no escape, for he was so close that the attempt would have been useless, and as both his air and manner inspired confidence, they allowed him to approach. Anima, after recovering from her fright, covered herself with her veil, though not before he had fully gazed upon her face ; Mariam was too much pleased with the appearance of the stranger to feel unhappy at his looks. He was, in fact, a youth of the most prepossessing appearance. His shape was that of great manliness, agility, and strength ; the breadth of his shoulders showed to advantage the slimness of his waist, his whole frame being poised most symmetrically upon legs formed as though they had been sculptured. His face, made up of features cast in a mould of great regularity, and animated by the expression of sense and goodness, would have been at all times his best introduction ; but in this instance they produced so magical an effect that fear gave way to confidence, and suspicion to goodwill. He was dressed in the costume of Mazanderan. His cap was placed on the side of his head, with hair in curl behind the ears ; a short vest fitted tight to his body by a belt, and descended to his knees ; a dagger was on his thigh, and a staff in his hand ; a small hatchet was inserted within his girdle.

With looks full of deference he approached the Princess and her attendant, and said, in the softest accent, “Be not in fear of me ; I am your slave ; tell me, as you fear Allah, where I am, in order that I may retrace my steps homeward. I have lost my way—benighted as I was last night, I passed my night under this rock, and know not where I am.”

"Who are you, sir?" said Amima. "How came you here?"

"I am a stranger," answered the youth. "I am from Mazanderan."

"But have you not heard of the corook? Do not you know that there is death in the spot upon which you stand?"

"Corook! what corook!" exclaimed he; "I am ignorant of every thing. I was hunting with my hawks yesterday, when this bird flew from me, and as he is a great favourite I pursued him until night-fall." He spoke in a hurried and perplexed manner, for his eyes were riveted on the beautiful form before him, in a manner so intense, and with looks so full of admiration, that he scarcely knew how to express himself. "But where am I? Before whom do I stand? My head becomes dizzy."

"Fly, stranger, whoe'er you be," said Amima; "should you be seen here, certain and instant death would be your fate."

"But we must find the way to Mazanderan for him," said Mariam, who did not seem anxious to dismiss him quite so soon.

"May Heaven pour blessings on your head," said he, addressing Mariam, "for those words! Be the consequences what they may, in pity permit one whose eyes are fascinated, to enjoy their fascination. Tell me, lady! by what happiest of events have I, one so little deserving of doing homage to the angel before me, been thus thrown on your path."

"The knowledge you require would only make you more certain of the danger of your situation, should you unfortunately fall into my uncle's hands."

"Your uncle!" exclaimed the youth, in accents of the profoundest respect. "Is the Shah, indeed, so nigh at hand! O forgive my presumption. Let me kiss the print of your footsteps, and let me no longer transgress your orders."

It was plain that both our hero and heroine, by this casual rencontre, had fallen at once into feelings of great mutual admiration. She longed to know his history, for his air bespoke one of noble parentage, and he could only desire to enjoy the delight of gazing on the unequalled charmer before him.

He was about taking a reluctant departure, when Mariam, diving into the mind of her mistress, said to him, "Take every precaution in leaving us; it is possible that you may meet the Shah and his numerous hunting equipages, and the Princess

Amima, whom you see here, fears that you might be molested ; but before you go, tell us who you are ?"

The youth, still with hesitation on his lips, and admiration and astonishment in his whole manner, was about to answer, when suddenly an antelope bounded by, apparently sorely pressed by huntsmen, and shortly after the trampling of horses' hoofs was heard, with the shouts of huntsmen. Several shots were then fired in the direction in which the trio stood. The interruption was so unexpected, so sudden, that the youth had scarcely time to throw himself before the Princess, to skreen her from harm, when a horseman on full speed, passing the angle of the rock before-mentioned, forgot his chase as he discovered them, and stopped, by one vigorous effort on his horse's rein. The consternation which seized Amima and her attendant, on discovering who it was, was so great, that it deprived them of all power of speech and action, and half fainting, half dragging themselves along, they hid themselves, like frightened birds before the hawk, behind the rock, which effectually skreened them from the gaze of the men. The youth, in the meanwhile, having very soon discovered the peril of his situation, and before whom he now stood (for it was the Shah himself), drew up to his full height, and put himself in an attitude, which, while it bespoke his independence, at the same time announced his determination to defend himself. The first impulse of the king was immediately to cry out with all his might to his attendants, "Seize him—slay him!" and immediately the foremost, dismounting from their horses, ran to put his orders into execution. As they approached their victim, he said, "Keep off, in the name of the Prophet keep off!" Again the king exclaimed, "Sons of dogs! why do you delay? what news is this? whose dog is this? *bekoush!* *bekoush!* kill, kill!"

Several more of the attendants coming up, sword in hand, and the youth finding that there was no chance of escape, for his assailants had now completely hemmed him in on every side, exclaimed with a loud voice, "Avaunt! desist! I am Zohrab!"

This name acted like a spell upon those who heard it. The king himself was now as anxious to save as he had been to destroy the stranger, and ordered a cessation of the attack with

as much vociferation as he had before urged it on. Every mouth was now hushed, and every eye turned towards him. At length, after eyeing him for some time from head to foot, the king exclaimed, "So, this is Zohrab! Oh well done, my good fortune! Zohrab is in my power! This is he with a burnt father, who has so long laughed at our beards. By the head of the Shah, by the soul of Ali, let us give thanks to Allah! Well done, my good fortune!"

All this while the youth kept a firm and steady countenance, and although he now stood in face of the bitterest enemy of his father and his family, yet he exhibited such a manliness and bravery of appearance, that no one could see him without a feeling of respect.

"How came you here?", said the king to his prisoner in a taunting tone. "You less than man! What have you to do hitherward?"

"What shall I say?" said Zohrab. "My evil star led me hither; of my own accord I came not."

"If you do not fear the Shah, at least respect the corook. What had you to do with yonder women? Speak, before your tongue is cut out!"

"I have no news to give either of the corook, or of the Shah, or of the women. I was hunting—my hawk fled from me—I pursued him—I was benighted. The morning found me asleep under this rock—on awaking I found two women standing before me, and shortly after I was surrounded by armed men. That is my history—what else can I say?"

By this time the rage of the tyrant, which to this moment he had in great measure suppressed, broke out upon witnessing the apparent coolness and indifference of his prisoner. "Dog's son! child of an unclean parent! ill born, ill-begotten slave!" said he; "is it thus you speak to the Shah? You die not, but you shall live to misery. I will cut your accursed family into a thousand morsels; dogs shall defile their graves; ay, the graves of your grandfathers and grandmothers, and all their ancestors. Take him, seize him!" roared he to his guards; "give him the shoe on the mouth if he speaks; tie him with the camel-tie, and lead him straight to the camp. Give him to the chief tent-pitcher, and let every tent-pitcher, one after the other, go and

spit in his face ; and then I will think of further acts of uncleanness to inflict upon him."

Upon this he rode off, and such was the violence of his rage, that he totally forgot the two unfortunate women, who were entranced with fears almost mortal at all they had heard, as they stood trembling behind the rock. They not only had heard what was said by the king, but they also bore witness to the indignities that were offered by his officers and servants to the unfortunate young man, as they pinioned his arms previously to mounting him on horseback to conduct him to Firouzkoh. One said to him, " That a Mazanderani should be a dog, or a dog's father, there is nothing new in that; but that he should turn rebel withal, that is the strange part of it!"

" Yet, Mashallah !" said another, " rebel as he is, still no doubt he and all his unclean generation call themselves princes and khans : let me do my worst on such prince's graves!"

" Give his elbows an extra twist with your shawl," said a young executioner's officer : " if he escapes, our heads, you know, will escape from off our shoulders."

All this time Zohrab said not a word, but allowed himself to be pinioned. The only effort he made was to turn himself towards the spot where the mistress of his heart had taken refuge, for his mind was more taken up with her situation than with his own miseries, and he endeavoured by looks of sympathy to assure her how much he felt at this untoward issue of their first acquaintance. No other sign of recognition took place between them but furtive looks, nor was it till he was mounted and conducted away that he could venture by an inclination of the body, to show her in any manner all the respect and admiration with which she had inspired him.

As he was about departing he released his hawk, and allowed it to take its flight, whilst he made a sign to his dog to leave him, which the faithful beast appearing to understand, obeyed, and was soon lost in the jungle, with his head in the direction of Asterabad.

CHAPTER IV.

A wise vizir is the anchor of the state.

PERSIAN SAYING.

It will be necessary to pause a little in the progress of our narrative, in order to inform our reader of some necessary particulars. Zohrab was the son of Zaul Khan, who had long been a rival in power and ambition to the now more successful ruler of Persia. During the wars of Kerim Khan, and of his successors, they had been closely allied for their own safety, and as they were both Kajars, a tribe which held its principal seat in Mazanderan, they looked upon the alliance which existed between them more as a natural family tie than as a compact between one political body and another. Aga Mohamed, from the superiority of his talents, and indeed owing to his descent from one who had as great a right to the throne of Persia as Kerim Khan or his descendants, had always been treated by Zaul as the chieftain of their tribe, and he acknowledged him as his lord paramount; but in Persia every man who wears a sword, and who can collect about himself a band of followers, however small, the more needy the better, always keeps up a sort of hope that he may one day, like many an adventurer before him, fight his way to the throne—and so thought Zaul. He was a man famous for feats of strength and activity, for his unwearyed perseverance and skill in whatsoever he undertook, and for a certain versatility of talent that had been of great use to him in his career through life. He was moreover brave, and consummate in all the arts of conciliation and negotiation, so much so, that in spite of the superior power of the Shah, he managed to create a preponderating influence among the tribes of Turcomans that inhabited the country bordering upon Mazanderan.

During the existence of Kerim Khan and his descendants,

there existed great friendship between Aga Mohamed and Zaul, and the latter had been very instrumental in discomfiting the many enemies which they possessed, and consequently placing his friend on the throne. For this he was invested with the government of Mazanderan, which, in fact, might be called a sort of hereditary property, and he continued to reside, as he had always done, at Asterabad, where he and his kinsmen had taken root. During the first year of the king's reign he continued unmolested, strengthening himself by making friendship with the Turcomans, and was looked upon as one of the best supports of the monarchy. But the great success which crowned every enterprise of the new king, his increasing power, and the total subjugation in which he had now placed every part of Persia, turned the head of Aga Mohamed, and where before he had behaved with liberality and honour, he now became oppressive and despotic. He forgot his obligations to Zaul, and behaved towards him as towards any other of his officers, vexing him with unjust exactions, and requiring heavier contributions than he was either able or willing to pay. This brought on much ill-feeling on both sides, until the Shah proposed to himself to dispossess Zaul, and to substitute a new governor. Zaul feeling himself strong, both in his own forces and in his Turcoman alliances, and still more secure by the natural strength of the country over which he governed, openly defied the power of the king, and resisted the approach of his governor.

It was on this occasion, for the first time, that the young Zohrab rendered himself conspicuous. The courage, hardihood, and wisdom which he displayed were so great, that they acquired for him the appellation of "the young Rustam," that celebrated Persian Hercules, whose miraculous feats were so much sung and historically recorded in that selfsame country of Mazanderan. At the head of powerful bodies of his father's troops he led on the attack with the sagacity of an old general, and whenever prisoners fell in his way, they always found that his humanity and generosity were equal to his bravery. Cherished by the Turcomans, their old grey-bearded chieftains looking upon him as their own son, he frequently undertook the longest and most painful expeditions, undergoing all their privations with a fortitude and a manliness which excited their surprise and admiration. At the period of our history, he had passed his first

youth, he was now about twenty-two years of age; his beard scarcely covered his chin, but to his fine person, which had developed itself into the firmest form, he added a mind which, had it been properly tutored, would have been unequalled in the most civilized age, either ancient or modern. His name was well known throughout Persia, particularly on the border country in which this part of our narrative is laid; it was used as much by the nurse to quiet the cries of her child, as it was by the soldier as a watchword for vigilance and wariness. To gain possession of this youth was one of the favourite projects of the king; for, aware how devotedly fond of him were not only his parents and family, but every person high or low throughout the country, he felt that could he secure so excellent an hostage for the good behaviour of the rest of the tribe, he should at once obtain by policy all that force could not effect: our reader will therefore not be astonished at the joy expressed by the Shah at the unexpected circumstance which so effectually accomplished the object he had so frequently revolved in his mind. Indeed, so overwhelming had been the joy at his success that it over-powered another strong feeling, that of jealousy for the honour and security of his harem, and which at any other moment would never have left his thoughts.

An event of this consequence put an end to the day's sport, and the king gave orders for an immediate return to the camp at Firouzkoh. It was, indeed, a melancholy ceremony to the captive, pinioned as he was, riding on a led horse, to be paraded in this public manner, open to the taunts and jeers of those who the day before would have turned pale at the mention of his name; but he bore all with fortitude, his courage and resolution rising with the desperate state of his fortunes. This event was known at the royal camp some time before the arrival of the captive, and when he came in view, every soul within it, and in its neighbourhood, had assembled to catch a glimpse of him. One might have supposed that the great Rustam, or even the *Div Sefid*, or the white devil in person, had been secured, such was the curiosity raised. He alighted from his steed at the guard-tent, which is always placed at the entrance of the serperdeh, and was there kept in custody until it should be known what the king's wishes concerning him might be. During that interval, it was easy to ascertain what

were in fact the intentions of the king towards him, for he was placed purposely in a conspicuous situation, and every worthless tongue was, as it were, invited to loose itself against the unfortunate captive. A bystander, who could have noted down what struck his ear, would have heard observations to the following purpose. "A bankrupt Mazanderani, indeed! See of what an unclean generation it is!—I have desiled his father's grave! —An ass is too good for his mother!—Go home, child! go tell your dog of a father that you have at length seen men and Persians.—What better than a dog ever came from Mazanderan?"

Zohrab's nature might have been borne down by such unmanly insults, were he not upheld by one strong feeling, in addition to his own innate pride, namely, the passion which the beauty and fascination of the young Amima had raised in his breast. Her fame was spread abroad as much as his own. In his own country she was adored by reputation; and she was looked upon as the only counteracting power to the king's cruelty and violence. Her charms were extolled as more extraordinary than those of the famous Shireen; and many who knew the perfections of Zohrab, were not wanting to flatter him with the assurance that he alone, throughout the land of Irâk, was worthy to possess such a treasure. Will it be thought strange, then, that in such a climate, and in a Mohamedan country, where love at first sight is of no unfrequent occurrence, Zohrab should have been so entirely subdued by this short though casual interview with our heroine? That he was so is most certain; for the total absorption of his mind in reflecting upon her image, in calling back every circumstance of the interview, in repeating every word that was spoken, in the interpretation of every look, all told him that this event had cast the lot of his future existence; and, let the base herd about him rail all they might, still the possibility of his having created some interest in her breast, cheered him, and gave a solace to his thoughts, without which he might have given himself up to despair.

The king's first act upon reaching his camp, was to dispatch an express messenger to Tehran requiring the immediate presence of his minister, Hajji Ibrahim. In every question of state policy, he made it a point to ally this wise man to his

councils; and as upon the proper administration of the person of his prisoner mainly depended the future subjection of Mazanderan to his power, and the friendship of the Turcomans, he felt that, if ever there was a necessity for the advice of a steady counsellor, this was the moment. In the meanwhile, with difficulty he could restrain himself from using violence towards Zohrab, whose fortitude under affliction, and whose steady indifference to the indignities cast upon him, excited his unavailing rage. "What!" would he exclaim, "is this burnt father's whelp to beard me in my very camp—to defy my corook—to invade my territory, and to laugh at my beard, without receiving the punishment due to his crime?" He ordered the humpback to keep a spy upon every word and action of the unfortunate youth, whilst at the same time he made Sadek (also his confidential servant) give him occasionally a counterbalancing account.

In the course of the second day, Hajji Ibrahim was ready to stand before the king. He had arrived with all the haste of a courier, which he knew was one of the best modes of securing the good will of his irritable master, and without waiting to take off his boots, or shake off the dust of the road, he was introduced into the king's tent.

"You are welcome, O Hajji!" exclaimed the king: "Come, come, in God's name! approach, for my soul is dried up, so much does this ill-born Mazanderani excite my bile—what shall we do with him?"

"May I be your sacrifice!" said the Vizir, "let not the Shah spoil his unexpected good fortune by precipitation. If a dog be a dog, it is of no use repining that he is not an angel. With a little forbearance, the asylum of the universe will become master of Mazanderan and the Turcomans to boot—a contrary line of conduct will lose him the prize for ever."

"Well you say, Hajji. Without you, the Shah would ere this have cut off the young caitiff's head, and thrown it over the walls of Asterabad, as a *peishkesh* [or present] to his unsainted father. Speak on—what is to be done?"

"Who am I, that should venture to speak my mind before the king of kings!" said the Vizir: "I am less than dust! Still the commands of the king are absolute. Your slave's opinion is this—that, instead of treating the Mazanderani with violence,

he ought to be treated with kindness ; that he should be detained as a hostage, but that his detention should be made as agreeable to him as possible. Let your Majesty give him some one to wife ; let future advancement at court be promised to him ; and he will probably be reconciled into a faithful servant, instead of being the means of keeping alive a warlike spirit among a portion of your Majesty's subjects, who for the interests of Irân should be conciliated. Your slave has spoken what he had to say ; for the rest, it remains in the royal breast to judge whether he has spoken wisdom or the contrary."

Upon hearing these words, the Shah held his peace for some time, and appeared wrapped in thought, until at length he slowly drawled out,

" *Eyb me dared* : There is no harm—*bad nemî gouî* : You do not speak amiss—In truth, you said well—barikallah —oh, well done ! You have given good advice, Hajji, by the head of the king ! By the head of the king !" he repeated again, " you have spoken well. True is the well-known saying, that a good Vizir is the anchor of the state ; and such you are, Hajji. Go, now ; go and take your rest, and again we will speak upon this subject. It is well I had not taken away the fellow's soul."

The Vizir was then dismissed : but still the Shah could not refrain from molesting his prisoner. Like the bloodhound, which, though muzzled, still snarls and snaps at what he thinks ought to be his prey, so the cruel propensities of the despot were longing to indulge themselves, notwithstanding the shackles of prudence which his minister had thrown over him. " What says he now ?" he exclaimed to his humpback, as he quietly entered the tent, and stood at the foot of the carpet.

" May I be your sacrifice !" he answered : " the captive says nothing ; but it is evident that he is highly satisfied with himself. He looks down upon men like dirt. He keeps his nose up, and heeds none of the abuse, praise be to God ! which the *bachaha* ! the children give him."

" Have you found out what brought him into this neighbourhood ; or is the story which he relates the truth ?" said the Shah.

" By the salt of the king ! by the soul of his father !" answered the spy, " it is impossible to discover ; so closely does

he keep to the saying, that to speak little is as precious as silver, but not to speak at all is more precious than gold."

"And so you acknowledge yourself an ass?" exclaimed the king. "You ill-begotten varlet! is the king to bear with your presencee, and not to be rewarded for it? Is an old beard like yours to be out-manceuvred by a smooth chin? Go, animal! go, and do your office better. If you do not pick the Mazanderani's brain, the king will destroy yours."

The humpback, although he was accustomed to such language from the lips of his master, yet never heard imputations thrown out against his ingenuity without feeling a rush of wrath in his breast; and he felt it the stronger in this instance, because Zohrab had, in fact, foiled all his endeavours to extract from him any information, either personal or political. On the other hand, Sadek, his rival, had succeeded in acquiring more of the captive's confidence in a short conference, than the other had by all his arts of cunning and ingenuity, during long visits, and this because Zohrab had discovered that the valet was brother to the attendant of the mistress of his heart. Who that has ever been in love has not felt that instantaneous interest created by any thing, animate or inanimate, which is connected, however remotely, with the object of his affections? It will not, then, be thought extraordinary that the moment Zohrab found that Sadek was brother to the confidant of the lady Amima, he endeavoured to create an interest for himself in that man's mind. And he succeeded; for Sadek, although a man of stern aspect, had a kind heart, which was ever ready to espouse the cause of the unfortunate; and so interested had he become in the fate and destiny of Zohrab, that he made a vow to forward his views and happiness to the utmost that prudence might warrant. Therefore, when he next attended the king, he did not fail to place the conduct of the captive in the most favourable light possible, asserting that the account which he had given of himself was the truth, and nothing but the truth; that he had shown the greatest moderation and forbearance, in not resenting the indignities which were offered to him since his residence in the camp, and seemed to resign himself to his fate with all the fortitude becoming a true believer.

Such a report as this, coming at the back of the advice which

had been given by the Prime Vizir, did not fail to produce some influence upon the mind of the Shah, and he gradually relaxed the feelings of irritation which he had at first cherished towards his prisoner. Although cruelty and misanthropy formed the foundation of his character, still he possessed sufficient control over himself to ascertain the best policy to pursue, and sufficient forbearance to suppress his passions whenever they interfered with his interests.

On the following morning the king called his minister before him: he so fully understood his worth, that he was scarcely ever known to shrink from allowing his coolness and judgment to allay the impetuosity of his own passions. In getting up that day, and during the usual operations of his toilet, he had again received favourable expressions of Zohrab from Sadek; and when Hajji Ibrahim came into his presence, he was in a sufficiently good frame of mind to act with the moderation towards his prisoner which his Vizir had recommended.

"Well," said Shah, "have you made any thought for the good of our service? We are well pleased with your advice, and require more."

"In addition to what your slave ventured to place at the feet of your Majesty," answered the Hajji, "he has thought, that if the prisoner were confided to the care of the Shah's chief executioner, Zerb Ali Khan, who would be responsible for his safe custody, to be for the first year confined to the walls of his house, until he was duly settled by marriage, and installed in office at the Shah's gate, the Shah's government would thereby be benefited. A hostage of his consequence requires more watchfulness and precaution, than a common hostage."

"So be it, so be it," said the Shah: "you have not spoken ill. We are satisfied." At the same time he ordered Sadek, who was in attendance, immediately to send for the chief executioner.

This office, one of considerable consequence in the Persian court, was always held by a man of great rank, and never far removed from the person of the king. He soon made his appearance, and having taken off his shoes at some distance, made one of his lowest prostrations before his royal master. In person he was tall, strong, and square-shouldered, of a fierce

aspect, his eyes shaded by a heavy and hairy brow, his beard full and crisp, and bearing in his aspect the air of dissolute manners, accompanied by uncompromising severity.

“Zerb Ali,” said the Shah, “you are to take into your special charge, Zohrab, our prisoner, which the *taleh* or good luck of the king so recently placed in our hands, and keep him in safe custody as a royal hostage, to be delivered to us whenever he may be required; and upon your head be it, if you fail in this your duty!”

“*Be cheshm!* upon my eyes be it!” said the man of violence, with an impassive countenance.

“You are to treat him with care and attention, for he is of our tribe and our relative! Let him want for nothing save liberty, and report to us his conduct during his confinement.”

“*Be cheshm!*” said Zerb Ali Khan.

“He must communicate with no one, save such persons as we may from time to time permit,” said the king, after having paused some little time in thought.

“*Be cheshm!*” said the Khan.

“Is there any thing else?” said the Shah to his Vizir: “Have we any other order to give?”

“May I be your sacrifice!” answered the minister: “the Shah might issue his commands for his future settlement in life, as one of the king’s servants.”

“True, true,” exclaimed the Shah: “It has just come to our recollection, Zerb Ali, that you have a daughter—a daughter, beautiful, large-eyed, a person of great dignity, and the mistress of a good understanding. Let her be given in marriage to Zohrab Khan. It is so fitting for the prosperity of Irân. That this be secret, on your head be it!”

“*Be cheshm!*” said the chief executioner, with the same unaltered tone and countenance.

The king then said to him, “You are dismissed:” and once more making his prostration, this emblem of the king’s executive power took his departure.

The rigid and unrelaxing muscles of the king’s face broke out into something that might be called a smile, as the executioner left his presence. “That is a good servant! *Wallah, billah!*” said he; “he would as soon order his daughter to marry, as he would order a head to be cut off. Whatever else I may be

deficient in," continued he in a musing tone, "I am rich in good servants. Mashallah! Praise be to God! Mohamed Shah needs not fear his enemies with such helps as his good fortune has given him!" Then turning to Hajji Ibrahim, who still stood before him, he said, "Shall we see the youth—shall we order him into our presence?"

"Whatever the king may order, so let it be," answered the Vizir. "Perhaps your Majesty had better first decide upon the steps necessary to be taken with respect to his father, Zaul Khan, the Turcomans, and the state of the province of Mazanderan."

"Mashallah, Mashallah!" exclaimed the king, "you are in truth a Vizir. Yes, the capture of Zohrab must immediately be known in Mazanderan, that the dogs of rebels may from this moment feel that their heads are left without a cap to cover them. We must forthwith despatch a messenger, and he must possess some token from Zohrab himself, to prove the truth of our message."

"Yes, yes," said the Vizir, returning at the same time the high compliments which had been paid to him for wisdom and foresight: "Whose dog am I, that should be called wise, when there is none in wisdom equal to our asylum of the universe?"

The king then ordered his attendants to bring Zohrab the Mazanderani before him. He would have wished to make a public exhibition of his prisoner, and have received him in his pavilion of state; but the Vizir reminding his master that every thing ought now to be done to conciliate, he allowed policy to get the better of his inclination, and agreed to receive him where they were, in the *khelwet*, or tent of retirement.

Sadek, on whom the office of introducing persons into the khelwet devolved, had taken special care that none but himself should produce the hostage before his master. He wished to forewarn him of the decisions which had been made concerning him, in order to soften, if possible, the inflexibility of temper which he discovered to be one of the leading features of Zohrab's character, and thus lead him to receive more favourably than he was otherwise likely to do, the language that would be addressed to him by the Shah. He found him seated in the corner of his place of confinement, having just risen from his morning prayer, with a mind so refreshed by this exercise that he was ready to

meet with fortitude, and even with alacrity, whatever might be his fate. At the sight of Sadek he sprang on his feet, and welcomed him with every greeting of friendship ; for he alone had shown any feeling for his situation, and he knew him also to be the only link between himself and the object of his passion. He eagerly enquired what was to be his fate, meaning by that how long he still might be permitted to live : so fully had he come to the conclusion, that death alone could finish the catastrophe of his captivity. His feelings on hearing Sadek's answer may better be imagined than described ; he almost entirely overlooked the horrors of a protracted confinement, the absence from his family, the wreck of his ambitious views in life, in the one hope of living for her who he felt was for ever linked with his own destiny.

Sadek informed him of every thing that had been decided, excepting that which related to the proposed marriage with the chief executioner's daughter ; for he thought it right not to touch upon a point which the Shah had expressly intended should be kept secret. The youth listened to every word with breathless attention. Had he never seen Amima, he would have looked upon the state of a hostage as the greatest misfortune that could have befallen him, and would have spurned at every compromise which might have been proposed to him between it and death ; but now he appeared in no way dismayed at the prospects it held out. All he saw before him was the pleasure of living in the same atmosphere, within the same walls, perhaps in sight of the very spot which contained her who was more to him than either life or liberty. At any other time, he would have met the Shah as an equal, or have advanced towards him as a martyr does to the stake : but now his nature was changed, he promised Sadek that he would demean himself with becoming docility, and endeavour to say nothing which might excite the wrath of the present director of his fate, whatever might be the provocation.

CHAPTER V.

A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger.

PROVERBS OF SOLOMON.

UPON appearing before the king, Zohrab made no difficulty in going through all the prescribed etiquettes, leaving his slippers at the proper place and making the usual prostrations. Sadek would have kept him at the utmost possible distance, in order thereby to show his humility; but the Shah ordering him to advance to an easy speaking distance, he obeyed, and stood, nothing daunted, with head erect and a firm countenance, exhibiting in his person a specimen of manly beauty which strongly contrasted with the degraded form before whom he stood.

The Shah having eyed him for some time, said to his Prime Minister, in conformity to the policy which he had determined to adopt, although in so doing the words seemed to stick at the bottom of his throat, “*Mashallah*, Zohrab is a fine youth!”

“*Belli, belli*, yes, yes,” echoed Hajji Ibrahim, with the drawl of indifference which Persians are wont to throw over their words; afraid lest the Shah might perceive how much in truth he was impressed with the strong contrast formed by the two individuals before him.

A pause ensued, during which the king still continued to eye his prisoner as if he could not sufficiently enjoy the pleasure of possessing him, until at length, no longer able to suppress the malice of his nature, he said, in a tone of intimacy, half raillery and half earnest:

“Zohrab, allow that your father is viler than the vilest dog; that the abomination which he devours is daily, hourly, and constantly; and that it is owing to his intrigues that the Turcomans have also partaken thereof, whilst you, who are innocent—you are to bear the punishment. It is not so, Hajji Ibrahim?”

The Vizir answered, “I am your sacrifice!”

Zohrab at hearing these words changed colour, contracted his brow, and bit his lips, but having caught the eye of Sadek, whose looks seemed to enjoin discretion, he remained silent.

"Unsainted curs that they are, they think," continued the king, "that their ill-begotten alliance is of importance to the state of Irân; that because I have allowed them to rally round my kettles in my wars, to be honoured with the dust of my horses, I cannot now do without them; that because they are entrenched in impenetrable jungles, and surrounded by mountains of difficult access, they are secure in their enmity to me, and can laugh at our beards with impunity. But we are not animals to that extent:—I am that king who has burnt the fathers of the Muscovites in their very hearths;—I am he who has made the dogs of Franks lick the dust of my slippers, and who has made Persia so secure from one end to the other, that the richest merchant of Ispahan, with bags of tomans on his head, might meet the neediest Baktiari on the high road, and walk by him unskinned and unrobbed. Whose dogs are ye, then, ye boors of Mazanderan! who dare to set up the standard of rebellion? Wallah, billah! by Allah! by the beard of the holy Prophet! by the sword of Ali! I swear, that were it not for this man," pointing to his Vizir, "you, Zohrab, with all your tribe, your old defiled father at the head, should grace the doorways of Tehran, cut into quarters and halves of quarters, before another moon had gone over your heads; and your skins spread upon the thresholds of the doors of every dog of a Jew and Christian, in order that ye might be defiled and reviled, spurned at and degraded, by those who are worse than the fathers of dogs! Do you hear," particularly addressing his helpless captive, cried out the frantic king, at the utmost stretch of his unmanly voice, "Do you hear? open your eyes, O you less than man! and make your thanks to Allah, that you have met with sufficient forbearance from the Shah to keep your head upon your shoulders, at a time when it ought to have been thrown under our horses' feet."

During this speech the revulsion which had taken place in Zohrab's breast, had entirely destroyed the equanimity which he had resolved to adopt, and made him lose sight not only of his own safety, and of the peculiar danger of his situation, but of the tender passion which had taken possession of him. When

his father was branded with the epithets which had so frequently struck his ear, he could scarcely restrain himself from rushing on the ungenerous utterer. His young blood boiled with indignation at the ignominy of this treatment : although in his cooler moments he had thought himself sufficiently armed against the language which he had been warned was certainly to be addressed to him, yet by the utmost stretch of his imagination, he never could have persuaded himself that it would amount to the insolence and coarseness which had just struck his ear. At the last words which came from the king, Zohrab drew himself up into an attitude of dignity and resolution, and with a face beaming with determination and contempt of consequences, he said with a firm voice, “I am in thy hands, it is true, an unprotected man, and thou hast the power to do with me what thou pleasest; but hearken to my words ! Whatever thou hast said concerning me I forgive thee ; thou mayest tear me to pieces, thou mayest make me food for dogs, or thou mayest give me up to thy slaves to be tormented, and I will not complain ; but when thou abuses^t my father, who is thy equal, and to whom thou partly owest thy elevation, who compared to thee is as the finest gold to the vilest copper, then I will speak ; then I will tell thee, base dog ! that I throw back thy odious words to thy face, and that I spit upon thy odious presence. And now do thy worst.”

The springing of a mine, the burst of a volcano, the first ebullition of popular tumult, are poor images with which to compare the explosion of frenzy which took place in the tyrant’s breast, upon hearing this speech. Every epithet that condensed rage could excite broke from his lips, in a tone of voice which resembled the ravings of hysterical madness. He half rose from his seat, grasping his dagger, as if he himself would give the finishing to his wrath by plunging it into the breast of his victim and would probably have completed the object of his first impulse, had not Sadek with great presence of mind thrown himself upon Zohrab, as if he would have done what his master was upon the point of doing. This movement in some measure checked the king’s wrath, and he re-seated himself ; but the moment he could resume his voice, he called out to the attendant ferashes, “Children of burnt fathers, where are you ? Will ye see your king insulted and not avenge him ? Kill—kill

that unsainted dog, and throw his vile carcase to the crows." Upon which Sadek rushed from the presence, as if to collect his band of ferashes ; but one more zealous than the rest, having stepped forward with a naked dagger in hand, would have immediately executed the fatal command, had not the Grand Vizir with the utmost precipitation thrown himself upon his knees before the king, and exclaimed, "I am your sacrifice ! For the honour of your throne, shed no blood—for the love of the blessed Prophet—as you would save your soul—let the wretch live ! The interests of your throne are too precious to be thrown away for so pitiful a thing as this young fool's life."

The devotedness of this action, the sight of one so respected in so humiliating a posture, and the forcible words which he uttered, produced an immediate effect upon the Shah. A sign from his uplifted hand to the ferashes immediately stopped the death-blow which they were about to inflict upon the unfortunate Zohrab. Still feeling the raging of his anger within himself, and not permitting himself to look at his prisoner, with an averted face he roared out "*Bero !*" (begone) as if by that he had rid himself of an intolerable burthen ; and when he was sure that the object of his wrath had been taken from his presence, he then turned to his still prostrate minister and said, "Arise, Hajji : as for thyself I am contented with thee ; but that dog of a Mazanderani, by Allah ! by Allah ! happen what will, him I will never forgive. I will sweep him and his odious tribe from the face of the earth. After all, why should I—I, who am a Shah upon my own musnud, bear this excess of abomination ?"

Upon this Hajji Ibrahim rose, and endeavoured, by every argument in his power, to show how totally unworthy of a great king it was, in the first place to shed the blood of an unprotected prisoner, and in the next to lose a prize of such value as Zohrab, with all its political advantages, merely to gratify a feeling of revenge. It will be easily imagined, that in the temper which the Shah then was, the Vizir did not fail to enforce what he had to say, in language the most palatable to a despot's ear. He succeeded in his object, but he did not go far in allaying the storm of anger and mortification which the words of the youth had raised, and which would not fail to sink deeper and deeper in the tyrant's mind as he dwelt upon them. In order to divert the current of his thoughts from their present channel, the Vizir

allowed applicants on business, or other pursuits, to be admitted to the king's presence. Among others appeared the Shikar Bashi, or the chief huntsman, with whom our readers have already become acquainted. He was a heavy-headed man, with a copious appendage of black beard and moustaches, large eyes and shaggy brows, mounted upon herculean shoulders ; coarse and rough in manner, he little knew the forms of a court, and although the king in the field allowed much latitude in the quantum of homage which was due to him, yet in general he was very punctilious when seated on his musnud, being aware that half the terror attached to his high situation, among a people greatly alive to outward show, would vanish were he ever to allow of one step which had the appearance of intimacy.

In order to comprehend the nature of the chief huntsman's present intrusion at court, the reader must be informed that it was frequently the custom among the kings of Persia, after a great and successful hunting party, in which game of all descriptions, such as antelopes, deer, wild goats, boars, and wild asses were slain, to erect a pillar, upon which the heads of such animals were fixed, either in niches, or on exterior hooks. There is a specimen of one such pillar now to be seen at Guladûn near Ispahan, the record of a hunt of the famous Shah Ismael, which, notwithstanding the lapse of centuries, still exhibits numerous skulls and horns of wild animals. Aga Mohamed Shah on this occasion had determined to leave a similar record. His hunting excursion, to the moment of Zohrab's seizure, had been extraordinarily successful, and when this unlooked-for piece of good fortune had befallen him, on the impulse of the moment he determined to erect a pillar of skulls, a *kelleh minar*, as it is called, in order that he might place the head of his prisoner, or, as one of his courtiers had called it, of his finest head of game, on the summit, thus to commemorate the great success of this eventful day. The order was given to the Shikar Bashi on the field, and not having been countermanded, was so quickly executed, that the monument had been erected, and all its niches duly filled with the heads, before any fresh order on the subject could be given. An iron spike was seen to issue from the summit, as if waiting for its last victim.

As soon as the chief huntsman appeared before the Shah, he made an awkward prostration of the body, and, without taking

off his boots, which in fact is etiquette for men of his profession, began his speech before the king had even deigned to look upon him.

This want of respect put the match as it were to the inflammable workings of the king's mind, and set fire to a train of angry epithets, which burst forth in the following manner:

"Who art thou, dog? whose cur art thou? Why dost thou stand before me with that head of thine, which ought long ago to have been food for a bomb? Must the Shah continue to partake of disrespect, as if he were a Jew or a Frank? Am I no one in my own dominions? Bearded by a Mazanderani boy—now butted at by a cow who would call itself a man! Speak, *Merdiki*, speak! wherefore standest thou there?"

The rough forester, little expecting such a reception, stood like one impaled, with his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth, and at first could scarcely utter beyond his "*Arzi mi kunum*," until after various attempts, fear having almost paralyzed his senses, he exclaimed, "The pillar is ready to kiss your feet; it is ready; the skulls have all been placed; there is only one skull wanting at the top—only one skull, by the head of the king! only one skull."

Whether acting under the influence of an eunuch's waywardness, or whether the king was struck by the coincidence of the chief huntsman's exposition, "one skull, by the head of the king!" is not to be explained, but certain it is, that he yielded at once to the temptation of spilling blood which was circulating in the fullest vigour throughout his frame, and exclaimed, "One head thou wantest?" "Yes," said the huntsman, "yes, one head, may it so please your Majesty." "What head can be better than thine?" roared the tyrant, in savage merriment. "Here, off with his head. *Ahi, Nasakchi*, executioner," he exclaimed to a man of bloody deeds, who was always in attendance, "here, go complete the *minar*." There was a hesitation amongst the attendant officers in the execution of this atrocious deed. The man called upon to act went doggedly to work, and innocence spoke so powerfully in favour of the poor wretch, that every one present seemed to expect that so barbarous an order would be countermanded; but, no! the animal was rife for blood, and blood it was determined to have. His horrid face broke into a demoniacal expression of fury when he saw that there was hesitation

in obeying his commands. The ragged skin which fell in furrows down his cheeks began to bloat, the eyes seemed to roll in blood, and the whole frame, from which in general all circulation seemed to fly, wore a purple hue ; he would have darted from off his seat, and not only have executed the fatal sentence upon his victim himself, but would have extended his revengeful fury to those who had refused to be the ministers of it, had not the Nasakchi Bashi in person (worthy servant of such a master), who had just reached the scene of action, with light and cunning step crept behind the victim, and with one blow of his deadly black Khorassan blade, severed the unfortunate man's head from his body. The heavy corpse fell with a crash on one side, whilst the head bounded towards the despot, the eyes glaring horribly, the tongue protruded to a frightful length, and streams of gore flowing and spouting in all directions. The Vizir, who was upon the point of again endeavouring to allay the passions of his dangerous master, had been too late to stop the executioner's hand; but well was it for him that he did delay, for nothing but the appalling scene that now presented itself could have counteracted the violence of the king. The moment he saw blood he seemed at once to be soothed into quiet. In the most wicked of our natures there is often a revulsion from evil to good. Conscience will raise her voice, although she may at first be refused a hearing. The lion gorged with his spoil, at once is tamed. This was the case with the Shah. He contemplated his work with a thoughtful look, his features resumed their wonted dull and leaden expression, and then, as if his wayward nature was not satisfied with tormenting him, he turned with asperity to the Nasakchi Bashi, and accused him in no measured terms with having officiously interposed in what was no business of his. "Dog and villain," he exclaimed, "why did you slay my chief huntsman ? what demon impelled your officious hand in this deed ? Well is it for you that there is such a feeling as compassion, and that the Shah can spare as well as he can spill ! Go, go ! clear up your work, and finish it by wiping your ownself from our presence."

Although similar scenes, equally characteristic of the cruelty and caprice of their instigator, were not uncommon, still to the horror of this scene succeeded a dread and appalling silence throughout the camp. Every man present began to feel inse-

cure of his own immediate existence: whatever might be his innocence, however unconnected he might be with the deceased, still he was apprehensive that a look might betray him to death, or that an attitude might be interpreted into arrogance when it was intended for one of humility. Even the prime minister felt in his person the chilling neighbourhood of a murderer, and he would willingly have taken his leave, but that he feared some sinister meaning would be affixed to such a step.

At length the king broke silence, and in a tone half sarcastic and half angry, thus addressed the Vizir: "Well, so you have saved your hostage at the expense of your king's wrath and of one of his most faithful servants. Now let us see what next thy wisdom will perform. We have our Zohrab here, it is true; he is bound hand and foot. So many maunds of flesh and so many miscals of blood. What then? will such a possession secure to us the quiet possession of Mazanderan, and the obedience of the Turcomans? Will that unsainted lion, his father, agree to give up his independence, his actual sovereignty over one of our finest provinces, for this cub of his whom we have caught? Speak, O Hajji; much wisdom is required of thee for having stayed our hand in doing a deed due to justice and ourself, instead of one which deprives us of services that are difficult to be replaced. Innocent blood, man, is not spilt with impunity!"

The blood of the Hajji mounted into his face, and he would have rebutted with indignation an accusation which implied that he was accessory to the murder of the huntsman, had not his habitual prudence come to his aid, and tempered his feelings by supplying the language of wisdom to his lips. "May it please the asylum of the universe!" said he, "who am I, that can venture to give advice? I am less than the dust under thy foot-steps: but let the Shah only send a messenger to the Khan of Asterabad, and tell him that his son is a royal prisoner, that death will be his fate if he does not acknowledge immediate subjection to the Shah's will; and upon thy slave's head be it, if something beneficial to the weal of Persia comes not forth from such a proceeding."

"And upon thy head be it, and upon the head of the hostage!" said the king with emphasis. "If within one week I receive not the fullest proofs of submission from the rebel Zaul, by the

head of the Shah! by the head of the Shah! Zohrab dies. Go, see you to this, from your hands I expect a speedy delivery from our state of indecision." And then, turning to Sadek, he said, "And into your hands I place the prisoner, Sadek Aga, until we reach the city. Upon thy head be it, should he escape!"

Upon this he arose, and in thoughtful mood retired to his khelwet, whilst those who had been in some measure spell-bound by his presence, felt relieved of an impending scourge as they saw him depart. The remains of the murdered man had been taken away by the nasakchees, and were immediately buried without the camp, the naked pike at the summit of the Pillar of Skulls remaining a memorial of the atrocity of the horrid scene which has been here recorded. Although sudden deaths of this description were common events, yet surprise struck everybody at this particular one, because the individual sacrificed had been a favourite servant, and one whose services it would be difficult to replace; but the rage of the despot knew no bounds; whatever came in the way of his passion at the time it was in action, was sure to feel its dire effects.

Zohrab, in the mean while, had returned to his former confinement with a mind in the highest degree of excitement, having just escaped the jaws of death, and still so indifferent about life that he felt no joy at its possession, but would have been happy for some good reason to get rid of it. He felt himself abandoned by all; the sentiment which had cheered his heart before the late scene took place, was blighted. "Who," said he to himself, "will ever think of one doomed to misery, lasting, hopeless misery?" He reflected, that upon his account his family were about to be plunged into disastrous wars, which could only terminate in ruin and desolation. He a thousand times wished himself dead; he deplored the interposition of the Vizir; he wished that the kindness of Sadek had not been exerted in his favour, and he would have himself plunged his own dagger into his breast, had not the principles which he had imbibed in his youth, and strengthened by the doctrines which he had read both in books and the Koran, come to his assistance, and driven the dastardly expedient from his mind.

"If misfortunes are decreed to me from on high," said he, "let me endeavour to meet them with the fortitude that becomes a man and a true believer. Let me imitate those of our mar-

tyrs who have bled for causes much more aggravated than mine." He was revolving these and such like thoughts in his mind, when the door of his tent was suddenly lifted up, and he saw before him the Grand Vizir in person, who came attended by none but Sadek. The prepossessing countenance of this minister, and his tone of conciliation, acted upon the excited feelings of the prisoner with all the effects of a charm; and the friendly looks of a face like Sadek's, which scarcely ever disrobed itself of its sternness, contributed in great measure to subdue his violence. A visit of this description too, at a moment when he expected to see at least a gang of executioners, produced an instant reaction in his mind; and from the extreme of despondency hope again dawned, and he could turn once more to the thoughts of home, and also to those softer emotions in which he had allowed himself to indulge.

The Vizir having seated himself, and requested Zohrab to do the same, whilst Sadek stood at the further extremity of the tent, said, "Hear! I am come as much your friend, and your father's friend, as I am a faithful servant to my own king. I am going to ask of you that only to which every person who has the smallest sense would immediately consent."

" You have saved my life, worthless as it is," said Zohrab, " therefore I am bound to you by every tie of gratitude. Whatever you desire, provided it be consistent with duty, I am bound to obey; but recollect, O my Aga, that it is you I obey. From you I may expect justice. But let me say, that if the abuse which I heard bestowed upon my father by the mouth of the Shah, be again repeated to me even through your's—here is Zohrab your prisoner, he agrees to nothing, save acquiescence in instant death."

" My son," answered the minister, " there is much to be said in extenuation of the king's wrath; but of that no more. You will hear no more abuse. All we wish is peace; and though you may now look upon your captivity as a misfortune, yet believe me, if you will subscribe to what I ask of you, the day is not far distant when you will praise the destiny which threw you into the Shah's hands; and affirm with the sage, that 'The sprinkling of ashes and tearing of garments may happen in the morning, but the song of the minstrel and the clapping of hands may close the evening.' "

will do all in your power to avert the mischiefs which we have announced to you as impending."

Zohrab lost no time in writing his letter, which contained precisely what he had informed the Grand Vizir it was his intention to write. With all that high feeling of filial respect which is so common in Persia, and which in his breast was almost paramount to every other worldly consideration, he felt that some blame might attach to himself, for having allowed his ardour for the chase to carry him so far beyond the bounds of prudence and the frontiers of his own country, thus bringing on his family misfortunes, which perhaps would otherwise have been averted; and that motive, added to others, prevented his giving any advice which might appear to aim at his own preservation. This done, he rolled up his letter, and unsealed delivered it to Sadek, who very soon after had returned to seek it.

In the meanwhile, the Grand Vizir had addressed an imperial firman, on the part of the Shah, to Zaul Khan, the governor, *Zabits*, and *Keikhodas* of Mazanderan, as well as to the chiefs of the Turcomans residing in that province, ordering them, on pain of being treated as rebels, to appear in person before him within a given time: and at the same time stating that should they disobey, the prisoner Zohrab, now held as a hostage in his hands for their good behaviour, would infallibly be put to death. This was accompanied by a letter from the Grand Vizir to Zaul, in which that minister entered at full length upon the whole bearings and circumstances of the case, showing the inevitable miseries which would attend any delay in obeying the Shah's commands, and particularly dwelling upon the royal intention of wreaking his vengeance upon the head of his son, upon whose praises he did not fail to descant, thus playing upon a father's feelings, whilst he in fact indulged in the expression of the truth of his own.

This done, the papers duly sealed, and addressed with every proper regard to etiquette, were delivered to one of the Shah's own gholams, who, well mounted and armed, was ordered to make the best of his way to the gates of Asterabad.

CHAPTER VI.

Truth among liars is like a true believer among infidels.

TURKISH SAYING.

We must now return to the spot where the fair Amima and her attendant, in the utmost trepidation, had hidden themselves from the turmoil which had attended the capture of Zohrab, and more particularly from the observation of the Shah himself. Like timid gazelles, scared by the presence of beasts of prey, they had sought the seclusion of the deepest thickets, and there awaited, in all the agonies of suspense, such as can only be felt by Asiatic women when left unprotected and surrounded by strange men, the result of the desperate tragedy that was acting so near them. Their senses scarcely served in giving heed to all that was said and done ; but, although they were much too alarmed to think of any thing but their own situation, yet when the words "I am Zohrab!" said so loudly and emphatically that they might have been heard at a considerable distance, struck their ear, they almost instantly laid by their fears, and lent the whole of their attention to all that followed.

Great had been the interest raised in the breast of the young Princess by the few words which she had exchanged with the unknown wanderer; but the instant she discovered who this wanderer was, then the whole of his glorious career, the reputation of his virtues, and the wondrous far-spread tales of his excellence flashed upon her mind, and produced a sensation which but too soon after she found had become the day-dream of her future existence. But at this present moment, when she had scarcely known him, and was about to witness his destruction, her agitation became so overpowering, that but for that fear of being seen by men which forms part of the nature of a Mohamedan woman, she would have rushed forward to oppose herself to so cruel an act. Her attendant was not slow

in remarking the interest with which the fate of Zohrab had inspired her mistress, and partook in almost equal degree the same fears for his safety. When at length the greatest violence of the turmoil had expended itself, and they could perceive that the youth had escaped death, but was carried away a captive, their apprehensions were calmed, and their only thoughts were how they themselves could escape unobserved from the awkward predicament in which they stood. With breathless anxiety they watched the steps and the countenance of the king, when, through a chasm in the rock which concealed them, they could perceive that face, which scarcely any one of his subjects ventured to look upon, had been convulsed with every variety of emotion, from excess of joy to excess of anger, and they fondly hoped that in the contending excitement he might have forgotten that they were present, or, still more, flattered themselves that he had not seen them at all. When he at length moved from the scene, without making inquiries concerning them, their whole animation was restored, and they could more particularly give heed to what took place. The king, surrounded with his officers, all glittering in arms of the finest workmanship, mounted on superb horses foaming with the animation of the chase, passed off first. Then immediately followed the prisoner, secured on each side by officers with their lances, in attitudes of great watchfulness. He was indeed an object upon which every eye might love to dwell. So perfect a model of beauty, of so undaunted though mild an aspect, and of such grace and agility was he, that we will venture to affirm, in his present forlorn situation, it was difficult for the eye of woman to behold him without feeling every sentiment of pity and commiseration, tinctured by sentiments of a still softer nature. Will it be surprising, then, that the eyes of the Princess, secure as she felt herself in her retreat, were riveted upon the unfortunate captive, and that every moment of time which was so passed was about to fructify into an age of recollections, subversive of her future welfare and peace of mind? Zohrab, who knew the exact direction in which the maidens had fled, did not fail to cast a scrutinizing look towards their retreat; and a certain thrill which he felt throughout his frame, as he thought his eyes met a corresponding look, unfolded to him sensations which to that moment he had never felt. We must

here intreat those of our readers who may be slow in believing that love can be produced at first sight, not to judge of the feelings and temperament of Eastern people by those of the North. The veil which constantly and entirely hides woman from the gaze of man in Persia, forms a strong incentive to curiosity, and is a great exciter of the imagination; and perchance when a woman can do so in safety, she will permit man to enjoy a quick and casual survey of her charms, and thus frequently secures his love and devotion. But in the instance of Zohrab and Amima, the circumstances which brought them together were in every way the strongest promoters of the soft passion; and when romance is thrown into the scale, it may fairly be inferred that a violent and ardent love might have been produced in both their hearts, and every rational person remain satisfied of the pureness and sincerity of that passion.

When the king, his prisoner, and attendants, had quitted the scene, and the solitudes of the desert were again left unbroken, the princess and her attendant ventured with cautious steps to issue from their hiding-place. Having ascertained that no one was present, and that no straggler remained behind to watch their steps, they first slowly wound their way through the rocks and thickets, and then with increasing speed returned to the intricate avenues which had led them from the camp. They did not stop until they had again reached the princess's pavilion, where, having laid aside their veils, they had leisure to recover their scattered thoughts, and converse upon the events of the morning.

Mariam, who by the presence of the Shah alone had almost been deprived of her senses, and entirely of the use of her speech, had now in great measure come to herself; and as she was in general afflicted with a great determination of words to the tongue, she felt herself greatly oppressed on this occasion, and began as follows:

“Allah, Allah! Oh, my Khanum, our star was a bad one when we found that odious road! God grant that we have seen the last of this adventure! for if the Shah should perchance have seen us, there is nothing else to do than to put our trust in Allah. On the other hand, *Bah, bah, bah*, Oh, wonderful, wonderful! that was a beautiful youth indeed, whom destiny threw into our road. For my part, I was never so near

a beautiful youth before in my life; and who ever could have thought that we should thus have stumbled over that blood-drinker Zohrab? Whatever they may say of him for the future, I will never believe any thing but good of him. Does my Khanum recollect his sweet words and dark eyes! Astonishing fascination surrounded all he did; it is well they did not kill him, for if they had, nothing could have prevented my cries and lamentations, and then we should have been discovered, and perhaps shared his fate. Men are animals without compunction! But you, my Princess, how have you borne this adventure? In truth, the Shah in your hands is like flax in the fingers of the spinner—you can do with him what you like; but for your poor slave, should he suspect me of having drawn your footsteps to that odious spot, there will be an end of me. But, suppose he should still wish to put the unfortunate youth to death, shall we do nothing to save him?"

During this speech, Amima, lost in thought, and full of the many consequences which might flow from the events of the morning, had little heeded the various topics upon which her companion had touched; but the last words which struck her ear being almost a repetition of her own apprehensions for the safety of Zohrab, she could not refrain from taking notice of them.

"Heaven avert it!" said she in great earnestness; "I am tired of hearing of blood; my heart sickens at the thoughts of cruelty; will my uncle never stay his hand! Mariam, this innocent youth must not die! It would be unworthy of a king of Persia to think of putting him to death."

"That is just what your slave was saying," answered Mariam; "he must not die. But, God avert it! suppose he were now dead. The Shah looked in a vastly killing humour when he left that ill-fated spot; and if the poor wretch once falls into the hands of the unsainted executioner, there is no salvation for him."

"You have not heard any thing, my soul, Mariam?" exclaimed the agitated Amima, not reflecting that there could not have been time enough, in the interval that had elapsed, for the king's return to the camp; "you cannot yet have seen your brother?"

"No," said the attendant, who now could sufficiently perceive

how strongly the current of her mistress's feelings set in favour of the captive : " No, the king cannot yet have reached his tent, and it will be some time before I can speak to Sadek ; but it is that horrid chief executioner whom I most fear, and who takes off men's heads before they can say a second ' God forgive me ! ' "

In this manner did they pass the morning, awaiting with painful anxiety the announcement of the Shah's arrival. The Princess in vain sought occupation ; her mind was too much taken up with the one subject to find amusement in her ordinary modes of passing her time. She tried in vain to embroider—she laid the frame on one side. If she took up her Saadi or her Hafiz, it was only to divine her future fate in a *fall*,* hoping to be blessed with hitting upon some passage which might include the destinies of him who stood the first in her thoughts. The sounds of music were now harsh to her ear ; and it would have been worse than martyrdom had she been condemned to hear a tale, however well told, from one of the King's story-tellers. At one time she would remain near her pillow in a corner of the pavilion, her eyes fixed upon one spot, motioning her finely-wrought cane fan backwards and forwards, evidently absorbed in thoughts totally new to her mind. At another, with deep-drawn sighs, she would apparently watch the playing of the fountain before her, whilst her whole soul was absorbed in what had passed, and on what were likely to be its consequences. Mariam, whose love for her mistress almost went to adoration, occasionally left her, anxious to set on foot some mode of immediate information, and again returned, standing before her, for long intervals, apparently unseen and unheeded. It was in one of those intervals, in the middle of a long silence, when every thing was hushed save the splashing of the water in the fountain, that on a sudden the discharge of cannon was heard. " By my father's soul !" exclaimed Mariam, " what is that ? the youth has been fired off from a mortar ! Oh, my Khanum, our soul is at an end."

" Silence !" said her mistress, starting up in an attitude of intense attention, her cheek blanched, her eyes expanded, her hand extended, as if wishing to catch a continuation of the

* A Persian mode of divination.

sounds ; when, hearing a few minor discharges, she said with calmness, apparently relieved from some mental apprehension —“ It is the sound of the zambureks ; the Shah has just alighted from his horse ; it is nothing !”

Her fine face, which had lost the soft and timid expression common to it for an instant, again was composed ; but it was easy to see that from this time forward she had lost her peace of mind, and that her character had all at once developed itself by this unexpected and impressive event : like some tropical plant, which takes long in coming to maturity, but which at once expands into flower by the violent heat of the vertical sun. ¶

It was noon, and having ascertained beyond a doubt that the discharge of cannon announced the king’s return to his camp, she retired into a corner of her pavilion, and there said her prayers with a renewed fervour—an act which, while it strengthened many a good resolution, tended greatly to quiet the disturbed state of her mind.

She had scarcely risen from her last genuflexion, when Mariam glided into the tent, and stood before her mistress with a face which indicated apprehension.

“ What has happened ? ” said Amima ; “ is any one arrived ? ”

“ My mistress has understood right,” said her attendant ; “ the Khajeh Bashi is sent to kiss your feet on the part of the Shah, and waits your commands.”

“ Do you know what may be his business ? ” said the Princess, a slight crimson hue just passing over her cheek.

“ As God is great,” answered Mariam, “ he did not say ; and to speak the truth, my soul shook so much with terror, that my tongue cleaved to the roof of my mouth, as I attempted to ask him.”

“ Bid him enter,” said the maiden, with dignity and resolution.

The Khajeh Bashi, a man still in the prime of life, was an old and faithful servant of the Shah’s family, and had served Aga Mohamed with great zeal, although he dreaded the violence of his character with a feeling amounting to something more than womanish fear. He consequently preserved the profoundest respect, not unmixed with apprehension, for his royal niece,

who treated him with kindness, as she did all other of God's creatures, but who frequently resented the groveling flattery and ultra-adulation with which he addressed her, by upbraiding him with it in the severest terms. He was a courtier of more than common courtesy, watched the uprisings of his royal master's countenance with all the assiduity of an astrologer calculating the aspect of a star, and had steered so successfully through the quicksands of despotic masters and their wayward tempers, that, like an experienced navigator, he almost felt equal to putting to sea in any weather. As to his appearance (and that perhaps might have been the reason of his preservation), his good star had made him many shades uglier than his master. The eye of the king was full of expression and could throw out on great occasions more than human animation; but this specimen of deformity had an eye which never exceeded the lustre of lead, excepting when he was under the bastinado, and then indeed it was full of fire.

Upon entering the pavilion in which the Princess was seated, ushered in by Mariam, he made the profoundest inclination of the body, having already left his shoes without; and stood in an attitude of deep respect, until he should be first addressed.

"What news have you brought us?" said Amima, "Almas Aga; * it is some time since we have seen you."

"As I am your sacrifice!" exclaimed the eunuch, "it has not of late been my good fortune to rub my forehead against the threshold of my royal mistress. Almas is her slave, and only waits her commands to show her the excess of his devotedness."

"I am always ready to see my uncle's faithful servants," said the maiden; "but what has brought you thus far from the royal stirrup? Certainly you must be come for a reason."

"The representation of your slave is as follows: that the Shah (God grant him life!) has ordered me to approach the print of your footsteps, and to kiss the hem of your garment, and with words sweet as dropping honey, and compliments expanding as the vault of heaven, to inform you of his return to his camp, blessed with good fortune, and impatient to make the pearl of his harem partaker thereof. But, in the sunshine of his joy,

* It is the custom in the east, to give to persons of this description, names denoting great value. Thus—"Almas Aga," diamond lord; "Aga Johur," my lord jewel, &c.

there has been a passing cloud. This is the story, if your slave may venture to relate it."

" Speak on," said Amima, preserving all the composure she was mistress of.

" This is the representation of your slave—that the Shah was pursuing an antelope in the very neighbourhood of these rocks, when, behold, his eyes were struck with the strange and alarming sight (saving your royal presence!) of a man speaking to two women. Naturally, the wrath of royalty was intensely kindled at seeing the corook so long and so openly announced, that most sacred of Persian laws, transgressed in so barefaced a manner. ' Slay, slay on!' said the centre of the universe to the mighty warriors around him; and death was about to be the reward of the transgressor, when, by the good fortune of the king, for the well-being of Irân, this individual, in self-preservation, cried aloud, ' I am Zohrab.' These words, which indeed acted like the charm of the language of Gins, arrested the hands of the slayers, and thus this fiend of a man was made a royal prisoner. But of the women the Shah knows nought—his wrath is excited—they can only belong to the royal harem. He suspects combination with the enemy; he thinks spies are in his camp; he vows vengeance. Such wretches can only be fit for instant sacrifice, and but for the dignity of his unequalled niece, who is a second self, whose word is law, who rules through him and by him, he would ere this have rid the earth of all that is called woman in and out of his harem. He has requested your highness, through your humble slave, to set on foot inquiries who of your highness's attendants have thus transgressed, in order to send them forthwith to those whose office is death; in order that the world may be instantly rid of such wretches, such ill-conditioned, such base-born—"

" Hold!" exclaimed the indignant and courageous maiden; " hold your peace! Go, tell the Shah that I was one of those wretches, and that Mariam, whom you see there, was the other." There was a beaming in her countenance as she uttered these words, which made her beauty quite resplendent. Her fear of doing wrong had triumphed over every other fear; and although truth was not a virtue peculiar to her nation, yet she had made it the principle of her life, and she was determined not to abandon it on this occasion; for as by it she had

principally acquired her ascendancy over her uncle's mind, she knew, if she were to be saved, that the strict adherence to it now, independent of higher motives, would be her best line of conduct.

The effect which this confession produced upon her attendant and the Khajeh may more easily be felt than described. As for the former, she saw nothing but instant death before her; she fell on her face in an attitude of supplication, first towards her mistress, then towards the king's officer, exclaiming "*Ahi Wahi!* Oh, woe is me, what ashes have fallen on my head! Oh, my mistress, why did you say this? Why do you thus deliver up your slave, your own Mariam, to death? why? why? After all, what harm have we done? How did we know a man was there? O that he and his father had burnt, before he had come hither—unsainted Mazanderani that he is? But why, my princess, my queen! why would you not conceal the truth? Who would have known that we were the women? Others tell lies; why should not those who have a right to do any and every thing? Oh woe is me! we die! the king knows not pity! And you, you with an evil eye," turning to the eunuch, "why came you here? you have turned the Shah's wrath upon us! We are creatures without a fault! Look at that angel," pointing to her mistress: "how can your odious eyes have thus dared to involve her in misery?" She would have gone on, but Amima stopped her, upbraiding her in mild terms for showing such fear of death, and more severely for her want of respect for truth.

The Khajeh, upon hearing the avowal of the Princess, exhibited an aspect which on a less serious occasion might be called ludicrous. He at first betrayed the greatest incredulity at her assertion, and immediately sat about combating it with the zeal of a true courtier. Among other arguments he said, "But, after all, have we not plenty of old women in the country? Let us choose two, and present them to the Shah as the culprits; nobody makes any count of an old woman." This more than any thing roused the generous nature of the Princess, who peremptorily ordered him to leave her presence, and to perform the commission with which he had been charged. He then became greatly perplexed what countenance to keep; for he felt on the one hand, if the maiden were indeed doomed to destruction, then he ought to treat her as an outcast, and make her feel the weight of his

guardian office ; but if, on the other, her great influence over the Shah were to prevail, he ought to show her more than common devotedness. As he was making up his face between the severe and the obsequious, all of a sudden it struck him, that were he to deliver the message of the Princess to her uncle, such would be the first burst of the Shah's rage, and such his incredulity, that it would at once fall upon himself, and, "God best knows," said he, "how it may fare with me ! He may cut off my nose, perchance my ears, or he may bastinado me to death." He then implored the Princess to recall her message, and endeavoured again to make her relish his doctrine of sacrificing two old women ; but all his endeavours were in vain : Amima persisted in her assertion, and told him that if he did not immediately deliver her message to her uncle, she would convey it to him by some other method.

This succeeded, and he soon after left the tent, accompanied by Mariam, who, being a party concerned, took no small pains to explain the whole transaction from beginning to the end, and even conducted the Khajeh to the turn in the rock which had led them onwards.

Amima, in the meanwhile, felt what a difficult path she had to tread. Hitherto her uncle had never relaxed in his affection towards her, and such had been the influence which she had acquired, that even in cases of much delicacy, when she had interfered to suppress his violence and cruelty, he had ultimately given her rather an increase of his confidence, than allowed her to perceive any diminution. But the present case wore a more serious aspect, and as he was of all beings the most suspicious, it would require more than the common workings of a straightforward honesty, to allay the violence with which it was evident he was impelled, and to bring him to see the whole case in its proper light. She armed herself with a firm resolution not to swerve from the line which her conscience assured her was the right ; and having repeated many a mental prayer, and fortified herself with many an exclamation of " God is great !" " God is merciful !" she endeavoured to await the event with all the composure in her power.

In the meanwhile, the report had got abroad among the women of the Princess's encampment, through the outcries and lamentations of Mariam, that she and her mistress were about

to be put to death. This produced a scene of despair which no pen could describe. In a body, headed by Amima's nurse, they rushed into her presence, and there, in all the varied tones of cries and lamentations, appeals to justice, bursts of execration on the Shah, assurances of love and affection for his niece, oaths never to leave her, and appeals to the Prophet and the Imams, they made such a complication of noises, that it was long before the fair object of their anxiety could persuade them that all hope had not fled; and that the Shah, most probably, when he had heard from her lips how little she and her attendant were to blame, would easily be pacified.

"What!" roared out old Leilah the nurse, "is that beautiful face, upon which I have gazed since it first opened its eyes, to be taken from us and delivered over to the executioner's gang? It cannot, it shall not be; may the father of him who can have even dreamt of such cruelty be burnt, he and all his ancestors!"

"Are we, who have eaten your bread and partaken of your salt," exclaimed another, "to be now bereft of a mistress, of our Khanum, for the whim of an unbearded Shah? Curses be on his head! let him and all who belong to him go and parade their souls in Jehanum!"

"Long life to our lady Khanum!" said a third: "whose dog is he who would venture to lift up a finger against her! After all, we are Persian women, and let us see the wretch who would dare to come within reach of our clutches!"

In this state was the encampment at Sawachi found, when Sadek, whom the Shah had sent forward to announce his intention of visiting the Princess, made his wish known to the guard to have an interview with his sister. The arrival of a messenger from the king of course produced a great sensation; but when it was known who that messenger was, the effect was favourable; inasmuch as Sadek, though a stern and inflexible man, yet had the reputation of being just, and moreover of being much attached to his sister. He was as usual admitted to the confines of the Serperdeh, whither Mariam had run to meet him with an anxiety bordering on frenzy; and her numerous questions, made with a rapidity which prevented her brother for some time from announcing what the object of his visit was, all tended to show the extent of her love for life, and the vivid impression which the words of the Khajeh had made upon her

imagination. She even suspected that her brother himself might have been sent to perform the last ceremony upon herself and her mistress. In vain he insisted that his serious cast of visage was common to him, and not all indicative of any sinister intention, as Mariam insisted must be the case ; his words were not heeded, and although he assured her that he was not in possession of any instrument with which he could do the deed, even were he commissioned so to act, she almost determined that a certain swelling in the regions of his pocket must contain the fatal bow-string.

Having at length satisfied her that her fears were unfounded, she gradually allowed him to explain the object of his visit. He said, that as soon as the Khajeh Bashi, in fear and trembling, had reported the lady Amima's avowal to the Shah, his Majesty, as the Khajeh anticipated, had redoubled the wrath with which he was possessed, and would have sacrificed to it the unfortunate deliverer of the message, had not the current been immediately turned against the chief tent-pitcher, who, as he asserted, ought to have explored every nook and angle of the rocks of Sawachi ere he ventured to pitch the royal harem within their circumference. He therefore immediately dispatched Sadek to explore the nature of the outlet, as described by the Khajeh Bashi ; to visit the very spot where the whole occurrence had taken place ; to return and make a report thereof ; and also to announce to the lady Amima, his intention to pay her a visit the moment public affairs in which he was engaged would allow him."

As soon as Mariam had received this intelligence, heedless of every thing else, she ran headlong to her mistress, and having now made herself as sure of life, as she before had been of death, she showed by the excess of her joy the change which had taken place ; and her example was so contagious, that all the women who before had rent the air with their lamentations, now did the same with their rejoicing, and one might have supposed that stark staring madness had possessed them all.

CHAPTER VII.

Despots may rave, and tyrants may enthrall;
But woman's tyranny surpasseth all.

The whole of the following day the lady Amima and her attendants were in expectation of the Shah's arrival, but the night closed without his appearance. This delay was in no manner disagreeable, for it spoke more in favour of the going down of the royal wrath than any other circumstance; it being always remarked, that if he allowed the excitement and violence of the moment to pass away, a reconsideration of the case was seldom productive of any great act of injustice. On the morning of the third day, however, it was formally announced that the Shah would positively arrive in the evening, and the proper preparations were made for his reception. But the noonday prayer was scarcely finished, ere a circumstance took place which harrowed up the feelings of our heroine to an unparalleled degree, and made her tremble to encounter the sight of him who was the occasion of her horror. On a sudden, distant cries and lamentations were heard, as if proceeding towards the Princess's tents, and at length they approached sufficiently near to ascertain that they came from a woman and her children, followed by a train of other women, who, apparently from the nature of their lamentation (it being the death-cry peculiar to Persia), were mourning the loss of some near and dear relation. The woman who headed the procession was in every way a striking object, of a tall and powerful form, the turn of her head and the expression of her face exhibiting wildness mixed with strong feeling. Her coarse black hair was dishevelled; her dress was torn and neglected; and her veil hanging loosely over her person, indicated a more than usual state of grief; and as she stalked along, dragging her children after her, ever and anon apostrophizing them as partakers of

her misfortune, it was evident that injustice and cruelty were the principal ingredients in the cup which adversity had prepared for her.

The Princess, who never allowed an object of charity or a person in distress, however low their situation, to be denied access to her, and particularly moved by the genuine accents of grief which struck her ear, ordered the mourners to be brought into her presence. Mariam, whose heart had lately been awakened by a sense of her own danger to every soft emotion, made one in the mournful procession as she introduced it to her mistress ; and as all the women of the camp, some by curiosity, others by sympathy, had come forth to witness the scene, by the time the complainants had reached the Princess's presence, the congregated mass nearly filled the tent and its avenues.

As soon as Amima could make herself heard, for the wailings and lamentations were continued to the very moment when the unfortunate sufferer had rushed forward to kiss the hem of her garment, she said to her, in a compassionate and soothing tone of voice, "Who are you ? why do you mourn thus ? what has befallen you ?" The woman could scarcely be persuaded to rise from the position which she had taken at the feet of the Princess ; and then amid her sobs, her cries, and her moans, she was heard to say, "I and my children are come to seek your protection ! for there is nothing left us but Allah and you in this world. All is taken from me and these poor orphans ! We, who were happy and blessed ; I, whom all other women called fortunate ; who walked with my head erect ; who had bread to give to the stranger, in addition to that with which God had blessed our hearth ;—all is gone ! at one blow we are reduced to be less than the least, to be curs among dogs ! Grief is our portion for the rest of our days, unless our princess, she who is the refuge of the houseless and the miserable, takes compassion upon us."

"But who and what are you ?" said the royal maiden, apparently much moved : "What is your case ? what is the origin of your distress ?"

The poor woman could not speak for sobs ; but several voices in answer exclaimed, "She is the widow of Aga Hussein, the chief huntsman, whom the Shah slew this morning."

"Allah, Allah !" exclaimed the young Amima, as her cheek

flushed, and her eye beamed with anger, "in the name of the blessed Prophet, how is this? What had Aga Hussein done, what crime had he committed, to deserve so sudden a death?"

The widow, suppressing her grief, and roused by the Princess's questions, arose and stood upright in an attitude as eloquent as the words which Nature put into her mouth. With one hand to her forehead, as if she were pressing the seat of her feelings, and with the other extended, sometimes towards heaven, at others towards her children, she exclaimed, "What crime had he committed! Oh, my Princess, what words are these? Crime was foreign to his nature; he was an honest man; he served first God, then his king; his duty was his only object; whatever he did was in zeal for the Shah's service; he never disgraced the salt which he had eaten. He was one of the oldest servants of the Kajar family; he was bred up as a boy in their service, and his beard had grown grey with them; when he prayed, it was to bless the hand which gave him bread. These poor children," (and here her feelings overpowered her, and she burst into violent tears)—"now these poor orphans—were bred up as loyal subjects; he never did a thing of which he could be ashamed, and his face, by the blessing of Allah, was always white. But now, O merciful God! where are those happy days, and what is my fate now! Is it Satan, is it evil destiny, that has been jealous of our good fortune? Hear, oh, my Princess! hear what our crime has been. The Shah ordered a pillar of skulls to be erected. The deceased Hussein, with that zeal so common to him, did not rest till it was finished. I sat up with him all night, in order that it might meet the king's eye in the morning. Shall I ever forget the joy and delight of the good man, as he placed each deer's head in its respective place, describing how it was killed, who shot it, distinguishing such as fell by the royal hand by a flower, and expressing his impatience to complete the whole by the head of a prisoner whom the Shah had found that very morning transgressing against the corook, and your sacred honour and dignity!"

Here the Princess was evidently much excited, and she listened with the utmost attention to what was further said. "No," continued the widow, "no; those last moments of joy shall never be effaced from my memory! Well, oh listen, my Princess; after our work we thought of nothing but of the

'Well done' which the Shah would be sure to say, and of the dress of honour which he would be sure to award the poor deceased ; and I left him as he proceeded to the presence, where he was anxious to announce the completion of the minar. What more shall I say ? My head becomes giddy ; I shall become mad when I think of what followed. Instead of my blessed husband returning home with joy in his face, decked with the robe of honour, and exulting in the approbation of his master and king, what did your poor slave see ? Oh, can I live to tell it ! Men came, children came, women came, all with a story—some with one tale, some with another—but all tending to one result, one horrid appalling truth, that my poor Hussein, that man without a fault, one of the King's oldest servants, had been slain ! Slain ! and by whom ? Almost by the hand of his old master : who had been more familiar with him than with any other man in his dominions ;—and for what ? Nobody knows : some say one thing, some another. But no, it was not the Shah—no, it was that wretch, that blood-spiller, that dog's son " (here the poor widow was joined by many of the other women), " that ill-born dog, the Nasakchi Bashi ; he it was, curses be on his beard ! he it was who struck the blow ! The Shah disowns it ; he it was :—blood we 'll have of him, we want blood ! blood ! we are thirsty for that villain's blood !" Here the outraged woman foamed at the mouth, her eyes flashed with fury, the action of her hands became excessive ; so much so, that the kind and gentle Amima almost shrank with fear at the frenzy which the unfortunate creature exhibited.

Exhausted by the violent state of her feelings, the huntsman's widow was borne away in the most violent hysterical fit, leaving such an impression of horror upon the mind of her compassionate hearer, that she almost determined within herself not to see her uncle ; but when she considered that her only chance of doing any good to the poor woman would be to work upon such feelings as he might still possess, and thus obtain for her a recompense, if such it might be called, for the loss he had inflicted upon her, she determined to the contrary.

At the close of the day appeared a messenger, saying that the Shah was on his road. The Khajeh Bashi first arrived to marshal the women into their proper places ; the carpets and musnuds were spread, and the evening meal prepared. At

length he came, and though but slightly attended, still his presence produced a sensation of awe that nothing could suppress—which might be likened to the instinct of smaller animals that feel the neighbourhood of some large and venomous snake, without actually seeing it. In his usual visits to his niece, he made a great distinction in her favour, for he never allowed her to stand before him. Indeed, such was the footing upon which they were, that he almost might be said to be the inferior, and she the person in authority, or the acknowledged superior; but on the present occasion, he took upon himself a more distant line of conduct, put on a constrained look, and as she approached rather averted his head, and did not invite her to sit. Having allowed her to stand for some time in common with the other women, he at length dismissed all excepting herself, and then, in an undecided tone, desired her, though very coldly, to be seated.

Amima, who had betrayed neither pride nor impatience at the treatment she received, at his bidding sat down, but said not a word. After some silence, in which there was an evident embarrassment in the Shah's countenance and manner, whilst that of his niece was perfectly natural and unconstrained, he said,

“ It is true that I am your uncle—it is true that I have cherished for you the kindest and tenderest feelings—it is true that you have behaved yourself hitherto with wisdom and with prudence beyond your years, and beyond the knowledge of women; but can that be true which you are said to avow?—that you, niece to the Shah—his almost second self—the queen of Irân—the head of all your kind in Persia—should have been found almost unattended in the midst of the desert, and that too by a youth, individually perhaps the most obnoxious person to the Shah and his state in the world? Can this be true? Speak. Our senses can scarcely allow us to think so ill of you, and still we have yet heard nothing to the contrary.”

“ True it is, most true. I have nothing to deny. The king has been well informed, and it has been the humble wish of his niece that he should be so, lest the punishment which may be attached to the fault, if such it be, should fall upon some innocent person.”

“ And is this all you have to say in your own behalf?” said

the king : “ Am I to be satisfied with this avowal, and with no explanation ? After all, you have words at command, and such words as frequently have made me do what my better reason would have ordained otherwise. Why do you not speak now ? The Shah is well inclined towards you ; but should he be deceived, let your eyes be open, and beware.”

At these words, the fire of virtuous indignation rose in the breast of the heroic maiden, and without hesitation and with much animation she said,

“ Although I speak to my king, in whose power is my life, and who wields that power—whether in justice or injustice his own breast can best tell him—yet I will not fear ! Deceit I know not—a lie I abhor—the whole circumstance attending my crime has been laid at the foot of the throne. Availing myself of the freedom graciously given me to wander at liberty over the wilds of these rocks, I did so, and by accident I met a man—and as soon as the consequences of that meeting were gone by, all of which are well known to the Shah, I returned whence I came. If innocence, total and perfect innocence, be not written so broadly upon the face of my narrative as to be at once understood, then I am willing to be called infamous. But if the Shah will prejudge—if he will be guided by his own passion—if his first word be slay—his first desire blood—his sole ambition to surround himself by misery and execration, then let him add Amima to his victims—here is her life, and welcome ! Beyond this explanation she has none other—she knows not what else to say—the rest is in the Shah’s hands.”

Had this been uttered by man, with all the animation with which it was spoken by the Princess, it is not necessary to say that the whole being of the person to whom it was addressed would have kindled into an instant flame of violence and wrath; but coming from the mouth of a maiden scarcely ripened into woman, who inspired sentiments as nearly allied to love as they could be in such a breast, whose beauty would have given a polish even to offensive language, which set off truth with irresistible witchery, and who, moreover, had made the influence and power which she exercised almost a necessity, it will not be thought extraordinary, that instead of wrath the Shah showed forbearance, and instead of angry retort adopted a meek and acquiescing demeanour.

"What words are these?" said the Shah; "cannot the king ask an explanation without being accused of wishing to shed blood? Cannot he inquire into the conduct of his niece, particularly when it comes before him with the suspicious character of the present investigation, without being accused of surrounding himself with misery and execration? The responsibility of kings is in proportion to the quantum of power which they take into their hands. We take all. To watch over every department, great and small, is our duty; and though women cannot understand such a necessity, it is as much our duty to be suspicious of every body,—ay, even of you, Amima!—as it is incumbent upon the watch-dog to take a survey of every one, be he friend or foe, who approaches the flock it has to guard."

"The good dog watches, the bad devours his sheep," said the undaunted maiden, a thrill of horror running through her frame when she reflected to whom she was speaking.

These words nettled the Shah, who began to feel that his niece was not ignorant of the death of his chief huntsman; and from having been disposed to waive all further investigation of her interview with Zohrab, he returned with redoubled acrimony to the charge. "Once for all," said he, "tell me, the Shah commands it, what passed when you and your attendant met the Mazanderani. Did you speak to him?"

"I did," said Amima, without hesitation.

"And wherefore did you?" said the king, in great wrath.

"The man knew as little who I was as I knew him. He took us for peasants, I suppose; for telling us the history of having lost his way in the chase, and having slept under the rock where we found him seated, he asked us the road back to his own country. We warned him of the corook, and at that moment you appeared in sight. That is all that happened. Could we have done otherwise? We should have combated fate, and forced impossibilities, had we acted in a different manner; besides, we were too much frightened to be in full possession of our wits."

"And thus it was, was it?" said the king musing. Luckily he did not ask whether the stranger had seen her face, for had he, we fear that the veracity of the maiden, being put to such a test, would not have remained unsullied. Fearing this question, she now became as anxious to get rid of the subject, as he was desirous to avoid the horrors of the morning scene, and by one

of those dextrous turns which she knew how to make when necessary to manage her uncle, she continued thus :

" And so, the Shah has been pleased to imagine that his slave and niece, she who has been brought up under his eye, who has not concealed from him any word that she has ever spoken, or any thought that has passed through her head—that on a sudden she should have entered into a conspiracy with a beardless youth to do—what?—Allah only knows! The wisdom of the Shah, so famous in all matters of great moment, surely could not have discovered any affair of state in this purely accidental circumstance. But if the Shah wants a pretext for getting rid of one who is a burthen to him, of one who does not sufficiently repay his bounty and generosity, then indeed he could not have seized upon a better : *Bismillah!* let him take her life."

" What idle words are these," said the Shah, " that you are throwing into the air? Has not my kindness been ever on the increase, and have you ever had occasion to complain of my treatment to you?"

" No," said Amima, " no! My face has, thanks to the holy Prophet! been ever white before you; but still I fear."

" How?" said the king, " wherefore should you fear?"

" Is it then unknown to you," said his niece, " that every living soul about you fears? Every one feels life insecure near you. Who shall not fear, when they see those who are your best and oldest servants fall? and shall I, an useless girl, one whose life is of no value, shall I not fear?"

Amima, who had begun this appeal rather in a playful tone, finished it with all the feeling and solemnity of manner that she could command; and its effect upon her uncle was that which she anticipated. Instead of the fits of fury which would have seized him had he been acted upon by man, here he appeared disarmed of all violence, and only exhibited signs of contrition. The soft and impressive manner of the maiden acted upon him as falling dew upon a parched soil, gradually softening that which was hard, and preparing for the production of vegetation that which otherwise would remain a barren waste. " God knows," said he in a subdued tone, " that my most earnest wish is to govern my kingdom with justice; but kings must not be judged like other men. Men who are least open to temptation

err—but, Allah, Allah! kings who live in constant temptation, what can they do?" Upon this he made a long pause, and then, with his head down, appearing much moved, he said in a subdued voice, "And thus I lost that poor old Hussein!—Where shall I get such another servant? Evil was the hour when the Mazanderani youth came across my path. We have committed a crime, which but for him never would have been; we have lost a servant whom we shall never replace, and my subjects look upon Aga Mohamed as a monster of injustice!"

Amima carefully avoided any interruption to this ebullition of feeling; but when at length she thought that he might be acted upon, she said, in her quietest and most tender tone, "If my uncle would in some measure repair, by a deed of justice, what so much now afflicts him, he has an opportunity."

"How, Amima?" said he, "how can I make that alive which is dead?—how can I restore that which is not to be restored?"

"No, that cannot be," said the maiden; "but the living may be recompensed for the dead; the poor Hussein had left a destitute widow and children—will the Shah allow them to perish of misery and hunger?"

"Ah! is it so?" said the king: "it is well you have said it. Where is she? where are her children? Let her be taken care of: Amima, I place her in your hands. Let the boys be well brought up; they are my property for the future. It is well you told me." He then sent in haste for the Khajeh Bashi, to whom he delivered his orders, that whatever the Lady Amima might ordain concerning the widow of the deceased chief huntsman, it should be implicitly obeyed; and further gave directions relating to the harem, which showed that his niece had acquired more influence than ever, and which made the Khajeh Bashi applaud himself for his dexterity in conducting this intricate affair.

The Shah continued thoughtful and serious to the last moment of his interview with his niece; and had she not known his character sufficiently to place but little reliance upon his fits of contrition, she might have hoped to have worked a reformation in him. At the close of his visit, his demeanour was marked with more than usual condescension to the women of the harem, for he left a present in money to be distributed amongst them, and moreover said kind words to those who were near him.

As for Mariam, she almost lost her wits a third time, for the king addressed her by name ; applauded her fidelity and attachment to her mistress ; and ordered that a dress of honour should be given her, as a mark of approbation, for her good services.

It was frequently his custom to sleep in the harem ; but on this occasion, departure to the capital for the next day having been fixed upon, he preferred returning to his own encampment. He had no sooner mounted his horse, than Mariam, followed by the other women, appeared before her mistress. Their hearts were too full of gratitude for the favourable issue of this visit, to observe the usual formalities upon approaching her.

“ God give life to the Shah, and to our beloved Princess ! ” said Mariam ; “ he himself, with his own mouth, spoke to me. What lies are those which would make him to be a man of pride and ill manners ! By the soul of our lady, he is a Shah of great discrimination ! he understands how to seek for merit ! He spoke to your slave for a long while ; related to me better than I know myself how good a servant I am ; and ordered that I should receive a kalaat, consisting of a vest of Cashmere shawl, a pair of brocade trowsers, and a new Ispahani head-dress.”

Amima could not repress a smile at the enumeration of the various parts of her future finery, and said, “ Did the Shah indeed order all these things ? I never knew that he was so well versed in a woman’s dress.”

“ Why should not he ? oh, my lady, my soul ! ” exclaimed Mariam ; “ for indeed he said a kalaat, and what can a kalaat consist of but of these things ? ”

“ So be it,” said her mistress, in a most affectionate tone, “ be it as you desire, Mariam. This is indeed a trifle compared to your kind services to me, to your fidelity and zeal ; and right happy am I that the Shah has distinguished you in this manner.”

“ He distinguished us also,” said another of the women, with some little asperity in her accent : “ we also are something.—He ordered us each a handful of money ; and money from the king’s hand always brings good luck.”

“ Yes, indeed,” said Mariam, “ the Shah has raised our heads to the skies.”

"And what is more," said the Princess, with great feeling and affection in her tone, "the king has ordered me to provide for that unfortunate woman, the widow of the poor deceased Aga Hussein, and her destitute children. Where is she, that we may not delay to cheer her heart by the intelligence, and at least endeavour to soothe her grief for the loss which she has sustained, and which, alas! by worldly goods can never be repaired!"

This news diffused joy among the assembled women, one half of whom immediately ran off to carry the joyful intelligence, and to conduct the widow to the presence of her benefactress. When she appeared, there was a fixed sorrow and melancholy in her demeanour, perhaps more touching than the violent and demonstrative grief which she had shown in the morning; and when Amima informed her of the good intentions of the Shah towards her, of his sorrow for the loss of so good a servant as her husband, and of the provision which he had ordered to be made for her, she appeared little moved, but merely expressed her gratitude to the Princess: the sighs which escaped from her heart, and the deep misery expressed in her countenance, being more eloquent interpreters of her real feelings than the most far-sought expressions. But when Amima told her that the king had ordered that every provision should also be made for her sons, that he had called them his property, and that at a proper age they should be enrolled among his ghollams, the injured woman, instead of being elated at such prospects, seemed to shrink with incredulity at the advantages held out to them. "Allah! Allah!" she exclaimed, "it is better that they should dig and eat dry bread in safety, than riot in luxury and live in fear of their existence. We also thought that the good-will of the Shah was all that was necessary for happiness. See where we are now! One glance from an evil eye, one stroke of destiny has destroyed all. The poor at least are free from this. Their condition is below envy—but they live secure—they have life, they have the Sun, they have God and the Prophet for them; what else can man want! Let us go in a corner, I and my children, and there live unknown and unseen; that is better than the love of courts!" This effusion, the produce of her misfortunes, but at variance with the common feelings of Persians, brought on a flood of tears, which greatly

relieved the violence of the widow's grief, softened her heart, and brought forward the most copious expressions of gratitude towards her benefactress. "God return your kindness a hundred and a thousand fold!" she exclaimed; "I and my children are your poor slaves, your rayats; do what is your pleasure with us! We will pray for you. May the holy Prophet, may the blessed Ali watch over you!" She would have gone on for ever, but Amima, stopping her, gave her the proper directions how and where to apply for the pension that was to be settled upon her; and as far as provision for the future was concerned, she had at least the satisfaction of seeing the unfortunate woman depart with a mind contented and at rest.

The return to Tehran on the following day having been proclaimed, the whole camp, both at Sawachi and at Firouzkoh, presented a scene of busy preparation. The chief tent-pitcher, whose negligence had been pardoned by the Shah at the intercession of his niece, was seen actively employed with gangs of his men in the tent department, whilst the mule-drivers, with their string of mules, came pouring-in in all directions.

Our narrative must now take us into a distant part of Persia; and, leaving the Shah to return to his palace, attended by his minister and his brilliant *cortège*,—the lady Amima to resume her occupations in the courts of the harem, and to dwell in secret upon the beauty, the virtues, and the misfortunes of the Mazanderani,—and Zohrab to begin upon the torments of a lover's as well as a hostage's existence,—we close this part of our history with this chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.

Whose dog are you?

PERSIAN FIGURE OF SPEECH.

It was in the deadliest hour of the night, about an hour after the midnight watch had been set, when the whole population of

Asterabad might be said to be wrapt in sleep, that the sentinel of one of the towers which flanked the Tehran gate of that city, was first struck with the howling of a dog. He had looked ever and anon at the moon creeping her way through the fleecy clouds which hung over the forest-girt mountains. He had mistaken the uncertain shades cast by her light for approaching enemies, and had found himself occasionally pulling his moustaches, or stroking his beard, to keep himself awake, when, luckily for the credit of his watchfulness, his ear was struck with the above melancholy sound. On any other occasion it would have made no impression, but on this it gave rise to imprecations, in which the soldier not only sent this particular dog, its father, mother, and ancestry, to grill in jehanum, but all other dogs: an exercise by which he found himself so much awakened and refreshed, that he gained credit that night for being the most vigilant *keshekchi* who paraded from turret to turret. The dog being posted without the walls, it was impossible for the sentinel to get at him, had he wished effectually to stop his howl; he therefore continued to pour forth his maledictions, at the same time that he sought for him with his eye. At length, when the first dawn of the morning began to exert its powers against the light of the moon, he discovered the poor animal crouching near the parapet of the bridge, looking at the gate with the intensest natural to dogs when they wish to be admitted. He certainly never would have deigned to give it a moment's consideration, had he not been determined in his mind, when he met it in the streets, to bestow upon it some mark of his revenge for the torture to which his nerves had been put during that night; but upon looking at it he was struck with its appearance, and he fancied that it was something more than a common cur. It was a tall dog, of rough coat, in shape a greyhound, with a hairy muzzle, and very intelligent eyes under sharply-erected ears. "By my father's beard!" said he, "I have seen that dog before. Curses be on its great grandfather! it must have belonged to some overdone ass of a Turcoman—may his liver drop!—But—what do I know? that's a dog which belongs to somebody—may his home be ruined, with that ill-conditioned noise at the bottom of its throat!" He was floundering on, through alternate guesses and imprecations, when to his delight he perceived the *onbashi* coming towards him with the sentinel who was to relieve him;

and from him he immediately endeavoured to gain a solution of his difficulty.

The *onbashi*, or serjeant, was an old rough Turcoman, who had faithfully served the present possessors of Asterabad in the field of battle as well as in the field of hawk and hound, and who was as well acquainted with every dog in the country, as he was with every private in his company.

"By your soul!" said the sentinel, who was an Asterabadi, "mine is dried up with the cries of that dog," pointing to it. "As you love your child, whose dog is it, for I have seen it before?"

"Whose dog is it?" exclaimed the old man, as he put his hand over his eyes to skreen them from the rising sun. "Allah, Allah!" he further exclaimed, having looked at it for some time, "it is Hemdum!*" By Khoda, by the blessed Prophet, by Omar, and the Imams! it is Hemdum; but where is the young Khan his master? May my child die if it be not Hemdum!" Upon that, raising his old cracked voice, he cried out to the impatient animal, "*Hemdum! ai Hemdum! ai janem*, oh, my soul!"

The dog's ear no sooner caught these sounds, than stopping its lamentations, it began to utter those shrill, yelping cries which denote joy; and, although it was worn with fatigue, to make certain curvets, bounds, and up-rearings, which indicated that it fully recognised the voice that called it.

"It is, it is the dog, and God is great!" said the *onbashi*, "but where is the young Khan? The dog without its master? This cannot be, or the world is gone back. Let us go see; perhaps he comes; oh, if he does, what joy will possess the city, for his house were in sad distress about him last night. Come, let us go."

Upon that, placing the new sentinel, and taking the other with him, they descended the narrow stairs which led from the walls to the gate, and, presuming upon the confidence which was placed in his experience, without asking permission of his *yuzbashi*, or captain, he opened the wicket to the anxious dog, whose nose thrust under the gate, and importunate snifflings, had long testified his certainty of the pleasure preparing for him. In one bound he cleared the barrier, and making only one leap of recognition upon the breast of the old sportsman, he plunged

* *Hemdum* literally means 'one breath.'

off at his utmost speed in the direction of Zohrab's paternal mansion.

"*Wahi, wahi!*" cried out the old man, in utter disappointment at not seeing the animal followed by its master. "What is this? what misfortune has fallen upon our heads? As I wear a beard on my chin, that dog brings bad tidings. Dogs have as much understanding as half our men, and a great deal more than our women. See, see where it runs; it is going to the Khan's gate: this is an evil hour!" Upon this he immediately proceeded to awaken his captain, and explain his fears.

The faithful and intelligent dog, in the meanwhile, calling up all its latent strength, rushed through the well-known streets and bazaars of the city, and made its entry into its master's gate just as the porter was throwing it open and performing the duties of his office. This old servant of the house, seeing a dog pass his threshold, its tongue out, its eyes almost starting from its head, and limping with agony, stopped his sweeping and leaned upon his broom, to observe what might be the meaning of so sudden an apparition; but no sooner had he recognized his young master's favourite hound, than, throwing down his broom, he hobbled after it with the agility that fourscore years might have left to him, overtaking it just as it had entered the wicket of the gate of the women's apartments. Its appearance soon attracted the servants there, and the rumour that was immediately spread of the return of Hemdum soon reached the master. Zaul Khan had just finished the last genuflexion of his morning prayer, when one of the black slaves rushed in and exclaimed, "Hemdum, Hemdum is come!" Zohrab's mother, the anxious mother of an adored son, the respected Ayesha, whose ears were open to every sound, heard this announcement with the most lively emotion, and rushed into the apartment where her husband was just then rising from his praying carpet. Together, without proffering a single word, they hastily issued from the room into the court. There, indeed, they beheld the faithful hound of their absent and beloved son, with just strength enough left to crawl fawningly, with wagging tail, and with eyes upturned, to the feet of his master's parents; and as they dwelt over its wasted form, endeavouring to read into every look, and to divine the meaning of its piteous whinings, the lustre of its

eye gradually decaying, and the palpitation of its heart gradually subsiding, they saw it at length a stiffened corse at their feet.

"What is this?" said the father, the dew-drops of apprehension breaking out upon his forehead.

"O my God!" exclaimed the mother, catching the agitation of her husband, whilst her trembling operated as powerfully upon him.

"What does this poor beast say? What tidings does he bring?" said the distracted man.

"Where is Zohrab, Zohrab, where is my Zohrab?" screamed the feeling mother. "Oh, what day is this, what ill-fated hour has come over us? Where is my son? See, see, his dog is come to die, to tell us of his similar fate. Oh, it is but too true!"

Zaul in the agony of uncertainty, of superstitious fear of a bad omen such as the one before him, and of sympathy in his wife's apprehensions, seemed to have lost all the strength and presence of mind for which he had ever been celebrated, and bent over the faithful hound, as if in his eye he could decipher what had really been his son's fate. In the meanwhile the whole household had caught the infection. The sounds of grief burst from every tongue with the most unaffected sincerity, for certainly never was mortal more beloved than Zohrab; and one might have gathered from them that a calamity of no common nature had overwhelmed both them and the community at large.

Zaul Khan, having recovered from the first burst of his apprehension, had sufficient power over himself to leave the harem, and to issue forth to seek for information upon the manner in which the hound had found its way into the city. The first person who presented himself to his notice was the onbashi, who related in great detail every circumstance of the poor animal's arrival, and who did not fail to add his own speculations upon this strange event to the facts he had narrated.

"Allah is great, Allah is merciful!" said the anxious father; "a wonderful event is this! But where is our Zohrab? tell me, men," addressing himself to those around him, "where is our child? What is become of him? is he dead? has he been killed? has he been seized by the tyrant? Speak! my head

turns round in uncertainty," and here this man, of an unusually firm mind, of great resources, of courage to scheme and to perform, cool in the field, ardent in council—in short, of qualities fitted both for theory and practice, was seen to succumb under the appalling fear of the loss of his only child, a child dearer to him than his life, for whom he lived, and in whose existence his own was identified. Covering his face with his hands, his manly countenance gave way to tears, and in this attitude he remained, seeking relief in mental prayer, and gathering up his energies to meet the severity of the blow, should it be destined to fall upon him.

It did not require much time for the news of the morning to be spread throughout the city, and the palace of the Khan was soon thronged by his numerous relations and friends, who with unfeigned interest came to be partakers of his grief. They surrounded the disconsolate father, and endeavoured all in their power to divert his mind from the conclusion that his son was dead. It was true, they said, that circumstances told much against him, but still how various are the events of human life! Zohrab was young, wise, and full of hardihood—he might have been too ardent in the chase—he might have lost his road as well as his dog—very likely, before the evening prayers, he would be forthcoming: in the meanwhile, twenty youths had already volunteered their services to go in search of him, when, if he was detained by some of the Shah's officers, they would answer with their lives to free him from captivity. In short, so much was said in favour of his being alive, that the willingly credulous parent gradually began to put by his first fears, and to hope all that his friends flattered him would come to pass. But it was not so in the harem; there the impulse of their first apprehensions had acquired strength, and had so increased the lamentations of the women, that it required the presence of the Khan himself to reduce them to something like reason.

Zohrab's mother was still in the prime of womanhood, having been married, as is usual in Persia, at a very tender age. She had only borne this one son to her husband, and consequently her whole soul was wrapped up in him. He loved his parents with an ardour equal to theirs for him. He carried his respect for his father to the utmost; and his attentions and care of his mother were unceasing. It will not be surprising, then, that

her anxiety for his safety passed the bounds of plain reason; particularly when her pride, which was so much concerned in possessing a son already so distinguished, had enlisted itself on the side of her maternal feelings; for his name had gone abroad throughout Persia,—he was extolled as a Rustam, his wisdom was equalled to Aflatoun's, and his beauty was pronounced more resplendent than Majnoun's. Thus her fears for his loss became uncontrollable, and she gave way to them with all the violence of eastern passion.

She had covered her head with a black shawl, and having seated herself with her face to the ground, was pouring forth her grief as if her son was actually no more. No words could soothe her; indeed, all she heard from the women around tended more to encourage her passion than to allay it; and so much had they wound themselves up to the certainty that Zohrab was dead, that they had already begun the funeral cry—but in accents different from the common cry, inasmuch as theirs was sincere, whereas the usual lamentation for the dead is one of mere etiquette.

It was in this state of things that Zaul Khan entered his wife's apartment, and seating himself close to her, addressed her in the following words:

“Arise, oh, my Ayesha! After all, Khoda is great! Let us hope that we are not sinners to that extent to have merited so severe a punishment. Be not thus cast down. Strange things have come to pass to-day, it is true, and a poor dumb animal has been sent to warn us of some heavy misfortune; but must that misfortune necessarily be the death of our child? There are many others to fear. The boy may have lost his road; he may have met, and have been detained by the Shah's officers; or he may be sick in some village. There are, you see, many misfortunes to fear, besides the final blow. Then rise, my wife! show yourself to be the wife of Zaul. As God has hitherto prospered our house, so will he continue to protect it. Let us not invite his wrath by our unworthiness. We have, Mashallah! friends—true and good friends—who will join us in seeking our lost child; and be he on the world's surface, we will, please Allah! find him. Arise! again I say; go to the bath, wash, put on your clothes, and let us patiently wait God's bidding.”

At length rising from her lowly position, the grief-stricken

mother once more sat erect, and looking upon her husband through eyes swoln with weeping, and with a countenance which would have melted the most obdurate heart, she said,

“Would to Heaven that Ayesha could hope as you hope! But wherefore should the poor dumb hound come here to die? Had its master been alive, would it have left him? Any living creature that has once known him, can it ever leave him? No; Zohrab is made to be loved. That form, that face, those eyes, that lovely mouth, are talismans which fascinate whatever beholds them. The dumb animal loves him as much as the speaking man. Then what must I do, who gave him birth, whose existence is wrapt up in his? O bring me some better tidings than mere hopes, which, if they be false, and we trust to them, will sink us lower in the gulf of despair than we are at present. It is best to know the worst at once.”

Indeed, so little anxious was she to be soothed (for grief once excited loves to increase), that she rather encouraged than restrained her women from bringing every thing before her which might remind her more and more of her son. And first, his nurse, a famous *Gees Sefid*, or grey head, an old woman who had seen him born, and who had brought him up in infancy, walked in, bearing the clothes he had last worn. “Here is his *caba*,” said she, uttering a piercing cry; “see, see, and here his girdle! Oh, Khoda! shall we never see him again?” “And here,” said another, “is the shirt he wore when he fought the king’s gholams, and here the blood which flowed from his wound!” Upon which they all uttered exclamations of despair, encouraging each other who should show most grief. A ragged black slave then came forward, and exhibiting a new coloured handkerchief, sobbed aloud: “Woe is me! when shall we see him again? See, this was his present to poor miserable me, when last he came from the attack upon Demawend; he forgot no one!”

Zaul Khan, finding that he might as well try to turn the course of a river single-handed, as to stop the current of these violent feelings, had sent for a Mollah of great eminence in the city, a reputed saint, to whose word he knew that his wife would be subservient, and who could direct the consciences of his household with as much facility as a cool steersman directs a bark when overtaken by a squall. The very mention

of his arrival produced an immediate effect throughout the harem; and having been admitted to sit on the outward side of the curtain of the harem door, as is usual on such occasions, Zaul, taking advantage of this circumstance, stole quietly away to give audience to the Turcoman chiefs and some of the principal men of the city who had come to condole with him, and to seek counsel upon this important occasion.

It has already been said, during the course of this narrative, that the Turcomans were in close alliance and friendship with the governor of Asterabad, in his hostility to the king of Persia. Their principal tribes in the immediate neighbourhood of that city and its territory were the Yemoot and the Guklan, tribes rich in cattle, famous for their breed of horses, and highly independent in their manner of life. It had been the evil policy of the Persian government to despise them, to treat them with contempt, and to lose no opportunity of vexing them, and particularly of taking from them by every means in their power, lawful or otherwise, their finest horses and mares. This was touching them in the sorest place; and although otherwise they willingly acknowledged the Shah for their lord paramount, yet it was obvious that, if ever they had an opportunity, they would throw off whatever allegiance they might have paid him, and adhere to those interests which might best screen them from oppression. When, therefore, they found in Zaul Khan a chieftain as ready to disclaim the Shah's power as they were, and as able as he was ready, they at once sought his friendship, and in conjunction with him, opposed and attacked the Persian authorities with all their vigour.

The Turcoman chiefs, who occasionally resided at Asterabad, going backwards and forwards to their encampments on the Dasht Kipchah, were Deveh Aga and Kior Aslan. The first was an elder of the Yemoots, and in his hands the tribe had placed their concerns with Zaul Khan and the Shah of Persia. The second was a principal warrior and chief of the Guklan, and he also, in conjunction with his colleague, was intrusted with the interests of his tribe. Deveh Aga, or the Lord Camel, was a tall broad-shouldered man, with a complete Calmuk face, small long eyes running up into his temples, high cheek-bones, narrow below at the chin, a very scanty moustachio, about twenty hairs sprouting from each side of the lower part

of his jaws, and fifty or more from the region of his chin. His eyes twinkled with great brilliancy; and, although on the whole the cast of the countenance was good, yet, when roused into anger, he was said to look like a mountain cat. Kior Aslan, or the Blind Lion, was a more aged man, furnished with more hair than his countryman, which fell in a snow-white beard upon his breast, and gave him a venerable appearance not common to these people. He had but one eye, as his name bespoke, having lost the other in one of the many conflicts in which he had been engaged: which gave him a fierce look, and added greatly to a certain quick and suspicious turn of the head, which he was constantly exercising, and which had been brought on by the watchfulness necessary to be preserved in those deep woods and thickets that form a belt round the province of Asterabad, when abroad upon a predatory expedition.

These personages held the uppermost seat in the assembly of notables who were awaiting the presence of Zaul Khan. In addition was seated Mustafa Khan, brother to Zaul, a man of noble aspect, with dark beard, and overhanging eyebrows, whose steadiness in council was frequently well applied in allaying the too anxious nature of Zaul, and who was celebrated for his feats of arms. He commanded the Asterabad troops, in conjunction with Kior Aslan, who had the command of the Turcomans, both doing duty by turns. A fourth person was Mirza Shireen Ali, a celebrated scribe and penman, who acted as Vizir or minister to the governor, and who was known to manage his affairs with so much skill, that, although suspected of being secretly in the pay of the Shah, he still had kept his post, and had a voice in the councils of the city. Many others, among whom were Mollahs and scribes of distinction, were assembled on this occasion, all having clothed their faces with dolorous looks, and awaited the coming of their chief in silence and occasional whispers. When he entered, they stood up. His face wore a solemn steady look; the resolution of keeping down the anguish with which he was oppressed, being strongly expressed in the contraction of his dark brow. After the assembly were seated, a dead silence took place, until Devéh Aga the Turcoman, a man of few words, undertook first to speak.

“Zaul Khan,” said he, “this business is a bad business;

however, God is great, and God is merciful! If our Zohrab is gone, what can we do?—such is fate. He is our child as well as yours,—he is much of a youth,—Allah! Allah! a wonderful horseman was he!"

"Yes, yes!" growled out the Blind Lion, who had ever been an ardent admirer of the absent youth, "the *Obahs** never saw such a Rustam before. God is great! But if he is gone, what are we to do? where shall we drive our heads to? The Turcomans without their Zohrab, of what use can they be?"

"If God has taken him from us," said the afflicted parent, in a scarcely audible voice, "we are the slaves of the Most High, therefore we cannot repine, but say His will be done! In truth, we may say that not only Asterabad, but the Turcomans also, have sustained a loss, for he was the soul of our body."

He would have proceeded to discuss their public interests, but the task was too severe for him, and he closed his lips. The assembled party were too much alive to the loss they were likely to sustain themselves, not to sympathize freely in the governor's feelings, and another pause ensued, until at length Mustafa Khan, in a more cheerful tone, said,

"In truth, every body knows that it is in vain to struggle against our destiny,—whatever Khoda hath ordained, it is the duty of every good mussulman to feel, as well as to exclaim, *Allah kerim der*, God is merciful! Yet, let me make use of a few words:—Why are we to look upon it as certain that our Zohrab is no more? Is it because his faithful dog came here to die? Allah, Allah! if we could read in the dying creature's eye that his master was no more, then, indeed, *Bismillah*, in the name of the Prophet! call in the weepers, call in the Mol-lahs, throw dust on your heads, tear your garments—Asterabad has lost the bright star which shone upon it—The tents of the Turcomans have lost their principal ornament. But, until we are certain of the misfortune that threatens us, is it not sinful to afflict our souls before our appointed time? Let not time be lost in useless grief, where much may be done in action. In the first place, it is imperative upon us to ascertain whether he be fallen into the hands of the tyrant, or not: if he be, we shall know the worst; the tyrant, in one of those rages which are the

* Communities of wandering tribes living in tents.

scourge of our country, may have taken another step towards the eternal fires which await him, by taking from us my nephew: but if not, wherefore should we entertain these fears? Animals, it is true, have more reason in them than man thinks they possess,—every day affords us some fresh instance of their sagacity; but if Zohrab were dead, the dog would not have left his body. The dumb creature came to us for succour of some sort; and be assured, that before long we shall ascertain what that is. In the meanwhile send some man of activity and discretion to the Shah's camp secretly, to inquire whether the youth be his prisoner; and if he be, then we may know how to act. Better then to make any sacrifice, than to sit quiet under such a misfortune!"

Mirza Shireen applauded this speech, and added many arguments to prove how much there was in favour of the existence of Zohrab: which so much restored to Zaul Khan those spirits for which he was eminent, that he immediately took upon himself, with the unanimous counsel of the assembly, to fix upon the man who should depart the next day for Tehran, should some tidings of the lost youth not have been gained before.

CHAPTER IX.

A twister of ringlets passing by, "Oh, my soul!" said a stick, "could I but get at him!"

PERSIAN ALLEGORY.

THE day was drawing to a close: the high points of the Sanduk mountain were tinged with the last rays of the setting sun, and the shades of evening were fast creeping over the dense vegetation of the dark landscape that surrounds Asterabad, when, on the long causeway leading to the Tehran gate, was seen a small company of horsemen bending their way towards the city. The sentinel posted at the turret having given the alarm, the gates were immediately closed, and both curiosity

and apprehension were abroad as to what might be the meaning of so unusual a visit. The approaching party had soon been discovered to be *Kizzilbashes*,* from their black caps, and their mode of riding, and they were now ascertained to consist of six people, with one led horse and two baggage mules. It will be necessary to describe with some detail the principal person of this band, because he will serve for the prototype of a numerous class, frequently met about the court and person of the monarch of Persia.

The *Gholam Shah* (for such he was), or the king's slave, is usually taken from the most respectable families of the country; is brought up from boyhood in and about the court; is early instructed in all the manly exercises, riding spirited horses, firing from off their backs on the fullest speed, throwing the jerrid, scaling the highest mountains, and, in short, fitting himself for being a guard to the king's person: he is the transmitter and frequently executor of his commands; the dread of all village magistrates and city governors, as well as an universal terrorist to the traveller on the road and the peasant in the field. The approbation of the monarch is his first and leading object: knowing that it will lead to substantial benefits, he loses no opportunity of distinguishing himself; and having served a long apprenticeship to all the arts of extortion and exaction, when he is sent upon the king's service to enforce a firman or to apprehend a defaulter, he is never slow in putting them into the most rigorous execution. Equipped in dress and arms in the highest style of extravagance, his demeanour is arrogant and presumptuous to his inferiors; and as his gains are proportioned to the fear which he produces upon those whom he is sent to visit, it may be imagined that what he wants in natural pride he makes up in artificial arrogance.

Such was the character of the person now approaching the gate of Asterabad. He was young and handsome; his beard just fringed his chin; long curls dangled behind his ears, and his eyebrows, strongly arching from an aquiline nose, gave a peculiar character to his marked features. His dress was in the extreme of the Persian fashion; he wore his cap small, very much pinched at the top, and quite on the side of his head; his

* *Kizzilbash*, or red-head, is a nick-name of old standing given to Persians

silken caba was fitted like wax to his tapering waist ; whilst a fine Cashmerian shawl expanded broadly over his hips, and was drawn into a narrow compass in front, and being there compressed by the silver string of his handsome dagger, this ornament formed a resting-place for his hand, when he was standing or seated. When on foot, in his high-heeled green slippers, he walked with a mincing gait, as if he might be suffering from a sprain in the back ; and when on horseback, he was either on the alert, bounding over the plain, reckless of impediment, his heel vigorously applied to his horse's flank, his hand out, and animation in every gesture—or slouching along with affected heedlessness. When standing before his superior, he would use those flattering forms of speech, which are the current language of Persian courtiers ; and when seated with his equals or inferiors, he would take upon himself all those airs which his superior had been practising upon him.

Sir Khan Beg was his name, which he found could very conveniently adapt itself to circumstances, occasionally dropping the *Beg*, whenever he wished to assert the Khan, and keeping to his latter title whenever he stood before a man in power. Having reached a certain distance from the city, he called a halt. Dismounting from his horse near a green spot on the road, whilst his *ferash* spread an embroidered saddle-cloth for him to sit upon he said to his *jelowdar* or groom, with a nonchalant air, “Aa Baba Beg, go on ahead—tell those dogs' sons in the city, that a King's gholum is coming, and order them to send out a *peishwaz* or deputation—and hear me, if they say an unfit word in answer, burn their fathers !”

Delivering up the *yedek*, or led horse, which he had hitherto led in procession before his master, to the stable-man, the servant said, “*Be cheshm !*” “upon my eyes be it!” and clapping his right stirrup to his horse's side, he galloped off at his fullest speed towards the city. In the meanwhile the valet having prepared a well-dressed kalloon, which he had disengaged from the leathern buckets carried on either side of the pommel, with his left hand on his breast, presented it bubbling and sparkling to his recumbent master.

“ What do you say, Hussein ? ” said he to his servant (for this sort of intimacy between master and man is common in

Persia); "will those wife-polluted curs in the city open their gates to us?"

"What can I say?" answered Hussein, as if he were a profound politician, shaking his head at the same time; "after all they are rebels."

"Rebels, indeed!" exclaimed his master; "we'll soon defile the grave of the father of their rebellion. The Shah, with one twinkle of his eye, will make their souls fly out of the first hole in their bodies."

"Yes, you have ordered rightly," said the servant, "particularly since we have got their Zohrab in our hands."

"What words are these?" said he contemptuously: "What is Zohrab? Zohrab is dung. Give me but a fair *maidan* (open space), a good horse under me, and a lance in my hand; let a thousand Zohrabs come, and you would see that one Shir Khan would laugh at all their mothers. Zohrab, indeed!"

"You have spoken rightly," continued Hussein; "in horsemanship you have not your equal. The Asterabadis have no *maidan*; their country is all mountain and jungle; where could they learn to ride?"

"Yes, yes," yawned out the boaster, pulling up his moustache at the same time; "a Mazanderani horseman compared to one from Irák or Fars, is the same as comparing a Persian to a Frank or a Muscovite."

In this sort of talk they continued to pass away the time, until the smoke of the *kalioon* began to feel too hot to the inhaler, when he expressed his impatience at the prolonged absence of his messenger. At length he was seen returning in all speed, and dismounting stood before his master.

"What do the dogs' sons say?" cried out Shir Khan.

"I beg to explain," answered the *jelowdar*, "that they received me with ill language from the top of the walls, and answered that they open their gates to no one, unless they first know his business."

"I have defiled their fathers' graves!" was the sole observation of the Shah's officer, who immediately ordered his horse to be brought to him. He then put his dress into better order, clothed himself with a handsome *baruni* of crimson cloth for

an outward coat, combed his curls, and mounting his yedek, or led horse, which was handsomely caparisoned, proceeded in person to endeavour to gain an entrance.

By the time he and his party had reached the city gate, the inhabitants, having been apprised of his approach, had lined the top of the walls in great numbers, the white veils of the women, wherever they were allowed to show themselves, appearing conspicuous among the black caps and dingy dresses of the men. The governor, having received due information of this event, had proceeded in person to the gate, where he and some of the principal men of the city, with the Turcoman chiefs, had taken post in order to be at hand to give proper answers to any proposals which might be made from without, and directions concerning the accommodation of their guest, should he be allowed admittance.

It was a matter of discussion who should take post on the tower in order to meet the first communications of the arriving messenger, because they did not wish to compromise their own dignity by sending too high a personage. At first they thought of leaving the sentinel only, then the ombashi, then the captain; at length, to save time and trouble, they determined that Mustafa Khan himself should be present, in order to prompt the onbashi.

When Shir Khan, riding forward, and leaving his servants a few yards behind, presented himself, these words were addressed to him—"Who are you, and what is your business?"

"I am Shir Khan, a gholam Shah, and the hearer of a firman and letters."

The voice from above answered—"The Shah's firmans are not read here."

"Then, as many as there are of you," said the gholam, in a careless though spirited tone, "you eat dirt. If you don't open your gates to his firman, he will come himself, and send them and you to grill in jehanum."

"Let him come," said the voice.

Upon this there was a pause, and the Shah's officer remained in suspense what to do; the day was fast drawing to a close, and the idea of passing the night in an open country belonging to the enemy did not tend to cheer his spirits. He therefore thought right to lower his tone, and said—"Is there no one

among you who will come forward to speak to me? After all, I am a Mussulman—I am a stranger—there is such a thing as hospitality in the world, and you would not leave us to starve in the desert all night."

The voice answered—"Say what is the nature of your business?"

"I have business, and business of consequence to Zaul Khan," answered the gholam.

A different voice from the first, with some trepidation in his accent, was now heard to say—"Have you any thing to say concerning Zohrab, the son of Zaul Khan?"

The wary gholam immediately perceived the drift of this question, and said—"Until the gate is opened I can say nothing. Be my business about Zohrab, or be it about Zaul, I cannot transmit the king's commands until I know to whom I speak."

By this time the impatience of the anxious father to gain some intelligence about his son had risen to the utmost, and as his allies, the Turcomans, were almost as eager as himself upon that point, it was agreed that the gates should be opened, but that the gholam should be lodged for that night in the guard-house close to the first gate, and not be received within the body of the town until the whole object of his mission had been ascertained. Accordingly, orders were given for the heavy bars which closed the gates to be withdrawn; and as the grating of the hinges was heard upon opening one pair, so the same noise was heard at the same time upon closing the second. The gholam was met upon alighting from his horse by one of Zaul Khan's officers, who conducted him forthwith to his master. Carpets and nummuds had been spread in a corner of the enclosure between the gates, where the governor, the Turcoman chiefs, and Mustafa Khan were seated. There was still enough daylight left for a broad gleam to reflect upon the assembled party; but when it became too dark for social purposes, then large lanterns were brought, and the scene was lighted up by the various contrivances common to people who live much in the open air.

Shir Khan Beg, who now thought that the moment had arrived for the display of his airs and graces, advanced towards the seated dignitaries with the affected superiority of a city fine gentleman over boors. But he was disappointed to find

that he did not create the sensation which he expected; for no one seemed disposed to rise at his approach, or to look with admiration upon his well-dressed and well-appointed person. Zaul Khan, seeing him advance, said—“*Bismillah!*” and pointed to a convenient place on the nummud; and when he and his company had slightly risen to him on their knees, he said—“*Khosh amedeed,*” “you are welcome.”

The gholam having seated himself upon his heels, with his sword placed diagonally on his bended legs, looked around upon his company with an air of perfect indifference; then fumbling for some time in his breast, he drew therefrom a pocket-handkerchief, in which was wrapt, with much care, the royal firman or mandate—a long paper rolled up, unclosed, and open to every hand; and having uncovered this, he stood up, walked to Zaul Khan, and carrying it first to his head, presented it, saying—“This is the Shah’s firman.”

The governor received it without any demonstration of respect, that is, without carrying it to his head; and waving the ceremony of immediately standing up and reading it aloud, which he ought to have done had he not been in rebellion, he merely desired the gholam to be seated, saying, as soon as he had communicated its contents to his friends, pointing to those assembled, the answer would immediately be communicated to him. With all this, it was evident that he was most anxious to inspect its contents, hoping therein to find a clue to the history of his absent son; but still his sense of what was due to his character restrained him, and he kept as firm and as unconcerned a countenance as he could.

“Have you no other news?” said one of the Turcoman chiefs, in no very courteous manner, and with all the roughness peculiar to their tribes.

“I have no news,” said the king’s officer.

“Perhaps you have some more letters to deliver?” said Mustafa Khan.

“Shall I deliver other letters when the king’s firman has not been read?” exclaimed Shir Khan Beg. “Shall I make myself an ass, and allow men to laugh at my beard? This can never be.”

“We want to laugh at no man’s beard,” said Zaul Khan; “we have only the present business in view. If you have other

letters, explanatory of whatever may be the object of your mission, deliver them, in the name of Allah! and I am your guarantee that you will not be detained for an answer beyond to-morrow moon."

Shir Khan Beg, who all this while was negotiating a little more consequence for himself than he expected at first to obtain, seeing that nothing was to be gained by creating further difficulties, at length produced the letter from the Prime Vizir to the governor, which he forthwith delivered. This Zaul had no sooner received than he opened it, and as he read, it was easy to see, by the brightening up of his features, that all immediate apprehension for his son's safety was at an end; as one may have remarked a mist portending a latent storm at once clear up and exhibit a brilliant sky and a smiling country. He still strove to keep down his feelings of delight, and with that mastery which Asiatics possess over themselves, a by-stander and a new-comer, such as the gholam was, could scarcely discover that he had been reading any thing but an ordinary letter.

But still the heart of the parent was not satisfied—it craved for something more to assure him of his son's existence; and therefore looking again towards the messenger, he enquired whether he had not omitted to deliver some paper which was alluded to in the Vizir's letter. Shir Khan would willingly have coquettled a little more, but finding that all deceit would be laid bare were he still to mask his game, he again produced a letter from his bosom, of smaller dimensions than the last, which he delivered to Zaul. Upon looking at the seal and superscription, the countenance of the father lighted up into ecstasy, and no longer able to control himself, he exclaimed to his surrounding friends, "It is from Zohrab!"—"Aye Barikallah!" exclaimed one—"Aye Mashallah!" cried out a second,—"Your steps are prosperous," said a third to the bearer of the news. "The *Mujdeh* belongs to you, and welcome," added Mustafa Khan, the uncle. In the meanwhile, Zaul had read his son's short epistle with mingled feelings of joy, grief, and admiration: of joy for his present safety; of grief for his captivity, and for the miseries which it was likely to bring upon his family and country; and of admiration at his magnanimity and purity of conduct. He did not give himself time to read it twice, but calling a servant, bade him hasten to deliver it to his house (so a wife is

called in Persia); and having done that, he turned towards the bearer of it, and said, "Sir Gholam, the delivery of that bit of paper has made me your grateful servant. Whatever I may be to your Shah, to you, his servant, I am sincerely thankful. I am sorry that the rules of our garrison do not allow me to receive you in my house, and that you must put up with poor accommodation to-night; but as to every thing else, you shall be supplied with all our city can afford."

Upon this the assembly broke up. Zaul and his friends departed to read the papers, and to consult upon the proposals they contained, leaving the gholam and his suite to take possession of the guard-room, where they were to pass the night. These premises consisted of one small dark room, plastered with mud, and spread with tattered rugs which had once been called carpets—of a square closet, called a *cufsh khoneh*, or shoe closet—and of a third room, which, with two or three stones set upon the other, occasionally served to boil a cauldron of rice, and was called kitchen.

As soon as Shir Khan Beg was introduced into this place, he broke out into the following form of speech: "May the graves of the fathers of all Mazanderanis be sat upon by jackasses! May curses descend upon their beards! I, who am a gholam Shah, shall I partake of their abominations? See, this is a place fit for a Frank's pig, and shall I get into it? Where are these less than curs, that I may do all that is most vile to their vile generations? Here, ferash," he roared out to his carpet-spreader, "here, throw out these tatters to their beggarly masters, and clean out this dog-hole." Having thus vented his spleen at the little success which had hitherto attended the settlement of his own importance, he betook himself to inspect his horses, and to give orders respecting their night's entertainment. During this interval, the guardroom had been swept out, his own travelling carpets and bed had been spread for him, and he did not then quite so much despise his place of repose, particularly when very soon after appeared several trays plentifully covered with refreshments from the Khan's own kitchen, consisting of every luxury in the way of refreshment.

Zaul Khan and his counsellors having retired to his house, assembled in the principal hall, and there proceeded to read the Shah's firman, and the Vizir's letter. The tone of the fir-

man, which was addressed not only to the governor but to all the authorities of Asterabad, including the Turcomans, was in every way insolent and tyrannical. It proposed the alternative of an unconditional submission to his power, to be marked by deputation or embassy, headed by Zaul Khan himself, which was to depart immediately to the foot of the throne, and there wait the king's pleasure, or—the death of the hostage Zohrab. The Vizir's letter, written in a friendly and conciliating tone, confirmed the Shah's intentions, and advised a speedy acquiescence to his commands.

The indignation of the whole assembly was roused upon hearing the language of the firman.

" May the Shah burn!" said Devéh Aga the Turcoman—" our tribes shall bury themselves in the sea of Aral rather than be subject to his tyranny!"

" Give me but a horse and a sword," said Kior Aslan, " and we will beat a *chappow* in the very heart of Ispahan."

Zaul shook his head, and thought of his captive son. Every one seemed lost in thought for some time—their whole energies were paralyzed when they reflected that he who was wont to direct them with almost unvaried success was no longer amongst them, but a prisoner in the hands of their enemy.

Mustafa Khan, who had not yet opened his lips, but who sat deeply pondering over their present circumstances, at length spoke. " It is plain," said he, " that nothing can be done until, by the blessing of Allah ! Zohrab is once more among us. Every thing must be sacrificed to that object. Our arms and legs are broken by his unfortunate seizure, and their strength cannot be restored until the youth is released. War is now out of the question. But are we men without ingenuity ? After all, we are not left without understanding. We must do by stratagem what we cannot by force."

" What can thought do, when there are walls, towers, guards, and ditch, between us and Zohrab?" said the Turcoman. " We can do much in an open country, but this case is desperate."

" Hearken," said Mustafa. " We must accede to the Shah's proposal. We will say in answer, that an embassy shall be sent. It cannot be otherwise. We will all go ; we will take with us all that we have ; horses, mares, gold, silver, every

thing ; but we will make play under the coverlid. Let us lose all, provided we regain Zohrab. But let us not forget that this Shah is an animal as cunning as he is cruel. He sits with his eyes open, but we must have more eyes than he. Zaul Khan!" (addressing himself to his brother) "order your Mirza to write a letter to that effect."

Zaul, who had not said a word, but was wrapped in thought, at length spoke. "Mustafa," said he, "you are in the right. Let us all keep of one mind, and our business, with the blessing of Allah, will prosper. Allow me first to read you Zohrab's letter; you will thereby see what sort of a son we lose if we abandon him." He then opened the letter, which his wife had returned to him, and read as follows :

"Oh, my Father! These few words are from your son Zohrab, a captive, who is threatened with death if you do not come and do homage at the Gate of the *Kalifah*. He cannot venture to give advice to his father; but this he can do : he intreats him to act for the interests of his country and friends, and to forget that such a being as Zohrab exists. Oh, my Father! forgive your son's faults, who prays to Allah for your happiness and preservation."

"God forbid," cried out the Blind Lion, the Turcoman, "that we should ever abandon him ! If it be necessary, I and my tribe will go with you."

"But, Zaul Khan," said the Camel Lord, "if you go, shall not we, perchance, lose both father and son?—and then what will happen?—the Yemoot and the Guklan will remain without a cap on their heads."

"Make your mind easy, Camel," said Mustafa Khan; "we are not men to lose our heads for want of a cap. We will write such letters by return of this gholam, that the Shah will remain satisfied of our intentions to execute his commands ; and for the rest, leave that to us. Zohrab will be saved, and Astera-bad and the Turcomans be more powerful than ever."

Zaul, who had understood by certain signs from his brother, that they were agreed upon some stratagem, then urged a separation for the night, recommending an early meeting, when the letters to be written to the Shah would be read : he then

proposed to send for the gholam Shah, to whom they would confirm by word of mouth what was contained in the letters, and forthwith dispatch him.

The assembly accordingly broke up, and the Turooman chiefs took their departure ; but previously to retiring for the night, the brothers held a separate conference, in which they agreed upon the scheme they intended to pursue, in rescuing Zohrab, and in again returning to their fastnesses and their rebellion.

The next morning, ere the sun had risen, found the same party assembled, with the addition of Mirza Shireen Ali, to whom the composition of the letters to the Shah and his Minister had been entrusted. He read their contents aloud, and it was unanimously agreed that he had surpassed himself on this occasion. He had omitted nothing. Every image which the mind can conceive was there. The nightingale of friendship kissed the rose of conciliation. Rivers of ink were made to run through meadows of paper, in order to create an easy navigation for the thoughts and sentiments of good-will and affection. The steed of acquiescence was made docile at the voice of the royal command, and the embassy of humility was ready to put the foot into the stirrup of submission. The Turcoman chiefs, who were more conversant with the language of shepherds and camel-drivers than with flowers of fine writing, lent an attentive ear to the reading of this composition, and expressed their high admiration by frequently exclaiming with the others, *Mashallah !* and *Barikallah !* But when it was over, the Camel Lord, in the simplicity of his heart, said, "This is in truth very fine, Mirza Shireen Ali ; but there is one thing I wish to understand.—What does the letter mean?"

"Yes," said the Blind Lion, "that is just what I also wanted to ask ; it is too fine for me to understand."

This did not in the least disconcert the scribe, who said, "We don't write to be understood, Allah forbid ! No fine writer ever did. Franks only do that. Read the *Tarikh Nasserî*,—is that ever understood ? Read the effusions of our first poets, in which all the art of the writer is placed,—are they ever understood ? Inshallah ! there will not be a Mirza at the Shah's gate who will be able to understand such refinements as Shireen Ali can place before them."

The party being all of one mind upon their operations

agreed that the gholam should be sent for, and be made acquainted with their united intentions to acquiesce in the Shah's proposals. When he arrived, refreshed as he had been by a night's sleep, dressed with all the elegance of an attendant upon royalty, and having been stared at, and, as he thought, admired, by the rustics who crowded the streets, he uttered his "*Selam aleikum!*" "peace be with you!" with a most jaunting air; and seeming to care very little whether the party rose up or not, seated himself upon the nearest place to the master of the house which he could find.

After the first compliments were over, Zaul Khan said to him, "It is necessary for you to know, that our intention is to put the Shah's wishes into execution without delay. We shall proceed to the foot of the throne immediately, and, *Inshallah!* when you arrive at Tehran, should you see my son Zohrab, as you love your own soul, say to him that we are well."

"There is no harm in that," pulling up his moustaches, said Shir Khan Beg, "if the Shah gives permission. Be it known to you that I, who am a servant of the crown, who always stand in the Shah's sight, for whom the king of kings has a ready condescension, perhaps I might say friendship, know for certain, that I am a man not like other men, and one in whom confidence is not misplaced. It is on that account that the king of kings selected me for this mission. 'Shir Khan,' said he to me, when I had my audience of leave, 'you are a good servant; the king has great affection for you. Come back with a white face from Asterabad, and, *Inshallah!* I will do things for you! Those cows of Turcomans and those asses of Asterabidis (by Allah! such were his words)', said he, 'will only be burning their own fathers the more, if they do not receive you with proper friendship and attention.' It is well," continued the gholam, "that you have determined to rub your foreheads upon the imperial threshold. You have done well. I will go to the king of kings, and by your soul I will tell him that I have done it all, and that you, Zaul Khan, and you Turcomans, are not in truth bad men; but when I explained the excellence and nature of our king of kings, that your understandings were enlightened, and that you agreed immediately to seek to sit under his shade, even as the reed seeks the protection of the chenar."

"Go and be blind!" exclaimed the old Turcoman chief, as

soon as he had heard this rodomontade. "What do we want of you? are you mad? Go take these letters; do what a courier ought to do; hold your peace, and get upon your horse."

This abrupt address to one of his supposed consequence, at first put the conceited Kizzilbash out of countenance; but taking a longer whiff than usual from his kalloon, and then pushing down his shawl so that he might contemplate the beauty of his waist, he turned towards the rough liver in tents, and said "*lebeh?*" or "What did you please to say?" with an air that might have rivalled the composure of a camel.

The letters were then confided to his care, with all sorts of precautionary injunctions relating to that which was addressed to the captive Zohrab. He received them with a protecting air, as if he were about doing the Shah a favour in taking charge of them; and forthwith took his departure. But it is most likely that he would never have behaved himself with the moderation he did, had he not been satisfied on the score of certain pecuniary gratifications or *enaum*, which the Governor of Asterabad and his brother knew too well were ever the first preliminaries towards acquiring a friend at court, however insignificant in fact he might be.

We shall now leave Shir Khan Beg to make the best of his way to the capital. We shall also leave the chiefs of Asterabad and their confederates to prepare for the embassy which, in the extremity of their distress, they found themselves obliged to send; leaving it to the forthcoming narrative to show how it was schemed, how it succeeded, and what was its ultimate result.

CHAPTER X.

When the saddle of love is placed upon the back of thought, then the mind of the wisest man may be ridden until it be driven into the race-course of folly.

PERSIAN METAPHOR.

THE camp of Firouzkoh having been broken up, the Shah returned to his palace at Tehran, revolving in his mind schemes for the subjugation of Asterabad and the Turcomans, should his summons of immediate submission not be attended with the success which he expected.

Our hero Zohrab had formed part of the royal suite, guarded with all the watchfulness necessary for the security of a prisoner of his consequence; and upon arriving at the seat of his future confinement, had been duly made over to the custody of Zerb Ali Khan, the Shah's Nasakchi Bashi, or chief executioner.

It will be necessary for the better understanding of our history, that the reader be put into possession of the locality in which the present part of it is laid, inasmuch as it will tend greatly to carry him along with Zohrab in the miseries of his captivity, and perhaps secure his forgiveness for any of the weaknesses which he might betray during its continuance.

The ark or palace of the King at Tehran is situated within a square fort or citadel, of which three sides form part of the general fortification of the city, and the remaining one is within the city, being defended by a dry ditch, walls, and turrets, and entered by a drawbridge. Immediately upon passing the drawbridge and the gate, is a range of armourers' workshops inclosed within an arched bazaar, through which the road passes into the principal *maidan* or square, entered by a gate which immediately faces the principal entrance, called the *der-e-khaneh Shah*, or the gate of the King's house, and which leads into the different courts, gardens, harems, and offices of the royal residence.

Entering the great maidan, on the right hand corner was situated the house of the chief executioner. Its gateway was in no manner distinguished from other houses excepting by its being thronged with hangers-on, and by the exhibition of a *felek** and sticks, which sufficiently denoted the office of its master. A rather intricate entrance led through a passage into an ample court, at the farthest end of which was situated the *dewan khaneh*, supported by pillars in front, where the master received his male visitors. A small door to the left opened into a detached court, which being passed, led again through a long narrow passage, terminated by a strong door, which entered a *khelwet* or private apartment. This consisted of a square court surrounded by high walls, on one side of which were a small suite of rooms, consisting of the principal one, which opened by a heavy sash of stained glass to the court, and of other smaller rooms for servants. This sort of apartment in Persian houses is often built on purpose for the use of any additional wife which the owner may from time to time take to himself; but on the present occasion it was destined to be the future habitation of the hostage Zohrab. Adjacent to this, separated by a wall, was the principal part of the anderoon or women's apartments, the residence of the Nasakchi Bashi's wife and family, and particularly of his daughter, a person who will hold a conspicuous place in our narrative. Close to the whole length of the building ran the walls of the town.

Zohrab was introduced into his place of confinement by Sadek, who had continued to be mindful of his well-being, although his conduct had been cloaked by apparent sternness. The unfortunate youth had been allowed to communicate with no one else, and it had been difficult for him to gather from his uncommunicative guardian more than the common occurrences of the day. One thing, however, materially soothed his own misfortunes, which was the intelligence that the cherished object of his thoughts, the lovely Amima, had escaped the effects of the Shah's displeasure for the part which she had taken in his captivity; and having once led on Sadek to speak of her, he wormed out of him many traits of her nobility of disposition,

* The felek is composed of a pole and a noose in the middle, into which the feet of those who suffer the bastinado are introduced and made fast.

which he treasured up in his own mind with all the avidity that the miser looks upon his hidden gold, and which, added to the recollection of every look and circumstance of his meeting with her, formed the one and almost sole subject of his meditations. Frequently would he exclaim, "Oh, my destiny! tell me, has it been for my happiness or my misfortune that thou hast made me acquainted with that heart-enslaver? Could she but know to what extent her lovely image has taken possession of my thoughts, perhaps she would pity me! But does she even think of me? Fool that I am to cherish such a thought! The captive Zohrab can never pass the threshold of her mind except as an object of commiseration,—never as one of love. Ah! could I but see the outside of the first wall which encloses her fair form, it should be the constant object of my worship. I would woo it even as the pilgrim worships the temple which contains the sacred object of his pilgrimage. But here, left to the contemplation of these four hated walls, what remains for me save utter despair? It is true, we breathe the same air and our eyes turn towards the same heaven, and with that let Zohrab be for the present satisfied. O Allah! give him strength and fortitude to meet his destiny like a true follower of the blessed Prophet!"

In this manner did he allow the current of his thoughts to flow; and were it not for a fund of manly fortitude with which he was endowed, it is possible that his strength could not have resisted the violence of the anguish which possessed his mind. Sadek had studied his comfort, in great measure, by providing him with books, and otherwise giving him the means of beguiling the tedious hours of confinement; but what were such resources to one formed for enterprise and activity? His mind frequently turned towards his family, and he waited with anxiety the return of his father's answer to the Shah's proposal; but love, a passion quite new to him, had so entirely filled every avenue of his heart, that it almost absorbed every other thought.

It was in this mood, on the day after his arrival at Tehran, that he received a visit from his host, Zerb Ali Khan. We have already described the fierce aspect of this personage, but it will be necessary to enter into a few particulars of his history.

In the beginning of his career, he had been a common ferash, or tent-pitcher, and had frequently distinguished himself in the king's presence by great feats of strength and activity, particularly by his extraordinary dexterity in administering the bastinado. He was then admitted into the khelwet, or the private apartment, as a ferash, where he succeeded so entirely in acquiring the royal confidence, that he attained at an early age the important office of Nasakchi Bashi. He took to wife when young, the daughter of the king's butcher, by whom he had an only daughter, who, instead of marrying at an early age, as Persian girls generally do, remained at home to be at once the torment of his existence and his help in the duties of his office. At the period of this our history, Zulma Begum, for so she was called, had attained the age of five-and-twenty. She was in person a true Persian beauty—large eyes of fire, bespeaking at once ardent passions and impatience of control—arched brows, meeting over a nose aquiline and prominent—a clear dark-brown complexion, which set off coral lips and brilliant teeth—hair in profusion, of the deepest jet, but rather coarse—and a form which, had it been confined within the limits of European restraint, although now fast spreading into coarse exuberance, would have been pronounced to possess the most perfect symmetry and grace. Taking her altogether, she was a majestic and awful beauty; but the expression of her countenance might truly be said to be of fearful import. She might be called a fine specimen of the sibyl—of wild and varied look, and of fierce glances and hypocritical smiles. She at first astonished the beholder by her beauty, and then disgusted him by her audacious manner. With great natural abilities she had acquired such an ascendancy in her father's house, that the whole administration of it might be said to be regulated by her.

She superintended the servants and slaves, freely punishing with her own hand those who misbehaved. She controlled the expenses both of board and stable, and at times she acted as moonshee, or scribe, her compositions being celebrated throughout the city. Not satisfied with these private occupations (unheard-of in Persian female life), she became ambitious of some more public employment, and she did not rest until

her father allowed her a voice in the management of those punishments, and even executions, which it was the dreaded object of his situation to inflict.

Zerb Ali Khan, who had gradually acceded to all his daughter's extravagant wishes, at length was so entirely controlled by her, that he could do no one thing without her consent. He was very anxious to take unto himself a second wife, but a hint to that effect had so roused the violent passions of the overbearing Zulma, who loved and protected her mother, that he was obliged to hide his diminished head, and quietly acquiesce in the protracted possession of his first, though now antiquated wife. The joy of his feelings when he received the king's commands to give his daughter in marriage to Zohrab, may be better imagined than described. He could dream of nothing but the acquirement of a new wife, and the abandonment of the old one; and every moment which delayed his reaching Tehran, in order that he might communicate the king's orders to his daughter, seemed to him an age. When at length he announced the intelligence, her first impulse was outrageous anger, which prompted her to load the Shah with every epithet of violence to which her tongue was but too much accustomed, and then to attack her father for having ventured to acquiesce in any thing which had not first received the sanction of her consent; but when he urged necessity, which involved perhaps his very life, and when she recollects who Zohrab was—the hero of the day, the man in whose praise every tongue was busy—the violence which she at first exhibited gradually gave way to quieter feelings, and at length she could perceive all the advantages that might accrue to the fortunate woman who should call Zohrab husband.

Under these circumstances Zerb Ali Khan first visited his prisoner; and as his future schemes very materially depended upon the captive's ready acquiescence, it will account for the conduct of the executioner, in smothering the real ferocity of his character, and putting on a courteousness and gentleness which were quite foreign to it.

"You are welcome under my roof," said he to Zohrab, as soon as they were seated : "such as it is, you are doubly welcome. I am a rough man and one of few words, therefore do

not take what I say for mere words. My house is yours, and every thing that is in it."

"May your condescension never be less!" said Zohrab. "I am grateful."

"The Shah (may God grant him long life!) has ordered me to make your life happy; to provide for whatever you may want: order me as your slave."

"Heaven forbid!" said Zohrab; "we are your prisoner, and dependant upon your generosity."

"What words are these?" exclaimed the executioner; "you are a person of consequence, of unequalled excellence; a Rustam in power, a Locman in wisdom. Who am I, that should venture to treat you otherwise than with the respect which is your due? The king, besides, has all sorts of condescension for you. Are not you that Zohrab, whose name has spread terror throughout his dominions; who, though so young, has shown the abilities of an old warrior, and put all our young men to the blush by your excellence? What words are these? Order, and see how quickly your commands will be obeyed."

"May your house prosper!" said Zohrab: "we want nothing, thanks to Allah!"

"But, Khan," exclaimed the other in a playful manner, "you must become one of us—the king, in truth, is a good king, and his service is full of pleasure and advantage. Why should a man of your superiority be lost to his country? The king wishes to attach you to him. Every thing—honours, high station, house, riches, wife—every thing awaits you. Why should such a name as yours be allied with those of Turcoman boors, when it ought to stand foremost in the annals of Irân, and be allied to all that is great and good?"

"Khan!" said Zohrab, with emphasis, "of myself I am nothing. God has made me the son of parents to whom I owe more than life: let my father order me to serve the king,—so let it be, upon my eyes be it!—but, until I know his wishes, I must continue a hostage and a prisoner."

"That is well—there is no evil in what you say," answered Zerb Ali: "but what harm would there be in settling yourself with a house? The Shah has ordered that a wife should be placed at your disposal. Is there any harm in that?"

"May the shadow of the king never be less!" answered Zohrab, smiling. "Who will give their daughter to one so ill-fated as I am? Besides, I am a dervish—life has lost all its charms—I am visited by misfortune. Give me a corner to sit in, and the vanities of this life will be my future meditation."

"Who will give their daughter to you?" said Zerb Ali, catching at the words. "What words are these? Your slave has a daughter who would kiss your footsteps, would you but allow her to approach your threshold: and I should think myself too highly blessed to call you son."

"Are you pleased to laugh at me, Sir Khan?" said Zohrab; "recollect that, ere this day closes, I may be no more. The thread of my life hangs by the frail tenure of the Shah's will and humour; and if my father refuse to accede to the proposals which have been sent to him, as he most likely will, your daughter, in espousing me, would espouse a corpse. There is uncleanness in the very idea. No, the thing cannot be."

The chief executioner having thus sounded his prisoner upon the object uppermost in his mind, took his leave, full of hope, if not of certainty, that nothing could oppose the Shah's commands, for he looked upon Zohrab's first intimations of refusal as of no consequence. He therefore went forthwith to give an account of his interview to his daughter, who by this time having well considered the subject in her mind, had so exalted her imagination upon the happiness and advantages which were to be her future lot, that her impatience can be compared to nothing but to the raging of a furnace. She would brook no delay—she wanted at once to become acquainted with Zohrab, claiming her right to visit every prisoner, in consequence of the former permissions to that effect with which she had been indulged. There was a terrace in that part of the *anderoon* which Zulma inhabited, that overlooked the small enclosure of Zohrab's apartment; and thither, as a preliminary to her future operations, the impetuous maiden betook herself. Zohrab, after his interview with her father, had left the room to take the air in the court, and to meditate upon the strange situation in which he was placed, in consequence of what he had gathered from the conversation to which he had just been a party.

"Allah! Allah!" he exclaimed to himself, "not very long ago I was as free as the wild ass on the mountain top, with a

whole world of wood and brake, plain and mountain, spread before me, for my pastime. Now, see me here cooped up like a wild beast in a cage ! Then, I have two alternatives placed before me, death or marriage ! The man who perhaps will be my real executioner, threatens me also with a more lingering death, by inflicting his daughter upon me ! Ah ! were that daughter she whom fate has placed beyond even the horizon of an expectation, who of a cottage would make a palace, who of a wilderness would make a paradise, then would Zohrab be content to forego all other worldly advantages, and be her slave for ever !"

In this manner did he allow his mind to run riot, totally unmindful that he was standing in full presence of a beaming pair of eyes, which watched his every look and turn with intense and enquiring eagerness. Zulma, wrapt in her veil, had nestled herself behind a wall, through which were two triangular holes, and there she sat with an attention riveted as fate upon her victim. She gazed with an admiration hitherto foreign to her heart upon his noble and manly countenance, the expression of which was saddened by his misfortunes. She dwelt upon the symmetry of his person ; she remembered every well-known tale of his daring feats, of his gallantry and generosity ; and for once seemed awed by the presence of one whose very look announced superiority.

She who had never before allowed any passion to lie dormant whenever it was excited, here scarcely ventured to breathe, so entirely was she overpowered by admiration and respect. Love in its most violent shape was fast approaching to take possession of her. All those rapid advances towards the acquirement of a husband at a moment's notice, were now checked, and she felt that to obtain possession of the affections of such a being as the captive who now stood before her, she must make herself worthy of him. She remained fixed in her retreat, until Zohrab returned to his room, and then, unperceived and unheard, she stole towards her own apartment, a different person from what she had before been. Softness of feeling had usurped the place of impetuosity and hardness ; reflection came in lieu of heedlessness and disorder ; and a desire to make herself agreeable shone forth, where before she was totally unmindful of every thing but her own wilful selfishness. When

she came next to speak to her father and mother, and her inmates in the harem, she was scarcely to be recognized—it was evident some change had taken place, for, instead of taking fire whenever any opposition was given to her will, she quietly acquiesced, and even seemed disposed to listen to advice. Thus, instead of urging an immediate personal acquaintance with the prisoner, she listened with patience to her father's recommendations to wait some time before she took such a step, as matters were not yet quite ripe enough for the immediate prosecution of the scheme, and the Shah's will must again be consulted.

The entire solitude which seemed to threaten Zohrab in his confinement, was broken by the provident attention of his friend, his secret friend Sadek, for so he may be called, who, foreseeing all the miseries likely to befall him, had he not some living creature in the shape of a servant to wait upon him, had fixed upon the eldest son of the late chief huntsman, a boy of about fourteen years of age, for that purpose. This appointment, which was at first suggested by Mariam to her brother, and perhaps by the Princess Amima to her waiting-woman, gave the liveliest satisfaction to the hostage, who immediately saw how much more agreeably and usefully his time might pass with such a companion, than entirely alone. Ali, for such was his name, was a fine intelligent boy, very quick of apprehension, and more fertile in expedients of every kind than boys of his age generally are. He was the poor widow's favourite, and although she parted from him with the greatest regret, yet she was happy to find him placed in such hands as Zohrab's, particularly as she could see him frequently. Since her misfortune, she had left Firouzkoh, and taken up her abode in Tehran, to be near her protectress; and scarcely a day passed in which she did not receive some token of her bounty.

"Ali," said Zohrab, "let us see, what do you know? Do you go to school?"

"I went to the *medresseh* at Firouzkoh," said the boy, "and attended our old Mollah, who taught me to read the Koran, and who gave me some lessons in writing, but I have not been to school since we came here."

"Why is that?" said Zohrab.

"My mother has been in constant attendance upon the

harem of the Shah ; and as we are new here, we generally go out with her."

Zohrab, from what he had learned from Sadek relative to the death of the chief huntsman, immediately felt aware that the widow's visits to the king's harem must have reference to the object of his thoughts and affections, and therefore his curiosity was immediately on fire.

" Whom did you see in the harem ?" said Zohrab.

" We generally saw the lady Mariam," answered Ali, " head vizir to the great Khanum who did us so much good at the death of my poor father !" and here the child's eyes filled with tears.

" And does your mother ever see the great Khanum herself ?" inquired the eager lover.

" Oh yes," said Ali; " whenever she has any thing to say, she sees her, for she never hides herself from the poor."

" And when did she see her last ?" said Zohrab.

" She saw her this morning, in order to tell her that I was to be placed with Zohrab Khan, and that the Shah had agreed to it."

" And did you see her too ?" said Zohrab.

" Yes, so please you, I did ; for, although it is said that I am now almost beyond the *had takleef*, or the age of being permitted to enter the anderoon, still the great Khanum allowed me to approach her, and I went and made my *ser ferou*, or bow."

" And did she say any thing to you ?" inquired Zohrab, with increased animation.

" Oh yes, indeed," said the boy. " She told me to behave myself well, for that I was going to serve a very great man, and one who would not fail to be a good master to me."

" Did she indeed say so ?" said the breathless lover: " Did she say so ? did she say so of me ?"

" Yes; and moreover," added the boy, " she ordered me a kalaat, that I might appear properly and handsomely before you ; and see"—pulling out some money—" she gave me this to buy any thing we might want."

Every word which he had just heard from Ali, gave a new turn to his thoughts; and from being utterly hopeless of ever again seeing her, his imagination made him conceive that through

the means of this simple boy, he might bring himself to the notice of his Amima. This conversation took place at the close of day, and, hearing the call of the evening prayer from the minarets, our hero ordered his young attendant to carry up his praying carpet on the terrace, in order that he might there say his prayers.

This being done, Zohrab followed. The view from this spot was confined to two turrets and part of the city wall on one side, and to the enclosure of the chief executioner's anderoon on the other; but, looking towards the main body of the Ark, several high portions of building were conspicuous, and among others a tower of considerable height. It was polygonal, and presented a picturesque appearance, as combine with the other buildings. On its summit was a room open on all sides, surrounded by lattice-work, and appropriated to the convenience of the Shah, who occasionally resorted thither to enjoy the cool of the evening after a sultry day. It was situated at one extremity of the royal anderoon, and might almost be said to look into the chief executioner's premises; for persons passing to and fro within the lattice-work, might easily be distinguished therefrom.

Before he knelt down to pray, Zohrab looked around, and his servant followed his example. The master's thoughts were too much taken up to heed even the presence of the boy, who on his part, both by look and gesture, seemed anxious to say something. At length, no longer able to contain himself, he exclaimed,

"Ahi, Sahib! sir, that is the place," pointing with his hand at the same time towards the high tower.

"What place?" inquired his master.

"It was even there," said Ali, "that my mother took me to see the great Khanum. It is quite certain. I was quite out of breath when I got to the top; and when I had done looking at the Khanum, I could see all the city round."

"Is it there where the great Khanum sits?" inquired Zohrab, straining his eyes while he examined the tower, as if he could pierce its very walls.

"Yes, yes," answered the boy, "in this nearest corner, for I see part of the stairs; and as I went in, she was seated just opposite, on that very spot. If you will look well and long, I dare say you will see her through the lattice-work."

"How can you suppose," said Zohrab, with a most inquiring accent, "that the great Khanum can be seated there?"

"It must be either the great Khanum or the lady Mariam, because none of the other women are allowed to go there; and if there be any one seated in that corner, it must be the great Khanum herself, for the lady Mariam would never dare to seat herself in her mistress's place." Then looking up with great earnestness, he exclaimed, "See, see! I saw something move. It is—it must be the Khanum, wallah, billah! By Allah, it must be the Khanum!"

In fact, Zohrab, who had not failed to use his eyes with all the vigour and attention of which they were capable, had for some time perceived some one seated on the very spot described by the boy. It was a female form, and his imagination had already made it out as most perfect and fascinating. His eyes became riveted, and so long did he remain in the attitude of contemplation, and so totally did he forget his prayers, that he permitted the shades of night to close in upon him, ere he thought of descending from his terrace.

Having dismissed Ali for the night, he gave himself up to thought. Sleep fled his eyes; he could see nothing but the form behind the lattice-work. To find himself all at once placed within sight of the beloved object of his adoration—to be certain of occasionally seeing her, and to think that so short a space separated them—threw his mind into a state of such strong excitement, that repose was impossible. He got up, he sat down, he tried a recumbent posture; nothing could satisfy him but another view of the tower, in order to ascertain beyond a doubt that it really was there, and that his present thoughts were not a dream. He accordingly again ascended to the house-top, and enjoyed the tranquillity of the scene, gazing upon the tower lighted up by the soft gleams of the moon. The coolness of the night refreshed his heated temples. He now became more collected; he recapitulated the whole of his past adventure, considered the difficulties which surrounded him, meditated with calmness upon the transitory nature of life and the world, and almost came to the resolution of never more venturing to look upon the tower, so totally hopeless did his passion appear. But who ever followed the cold dictates of pru-

dence when entangled by love? What mortal ever withstood the combination of temptations such as those which now assailed our disconsolate hero? He passed the night in watchfulness; it was only towards the morning that he fell asleep, and then only to be disturbed by visions the most opposite—at one moment to think himself entering the bowers of eternal bliss, at another to feel that the executioner's scimitar was suspended over him; again, to conceive himself kissing the hem of Amima's garment, and then to feel himself snatched from her by the orders of a bloodthirsty tyrant. Such harassing dreams, instead of refreshing, only unmanned him the more; and when Ali in the morning drew up the broad curtain that was suspended on the outside of his window, he awoke with a start, as if he had been called upon in reality to experience one of the horrible scenes with which his nervous imagination had been afflicting him.

CHAPTER XI.

He who would look down from a high place, must have a firm head.

EASTERN PROVERB.

THE lady Amima having followed the Shah to Tehran, returned to her apartments and daily avocations, in the harem. She occupied one of the principal courts in the royal palace, which it had been the care of her uncle to ornament in a manner suited to the residence of the head of his house. Every luxury that could be devised was here collected. The great square, around which the living-rooms were situated, was planted with rare flowers and shrubs, and watered by a hundred fountains. Here were to be seen groves of cypress-trees; avenues of elastic poplars were waving to the breeze, varied by the broad and spreading chenar; flowers of all hues decked the angular walks which intersected this little paradise, and were cultivated under the immediate direction of its lovely tenant. A basin of water, con-

stantly renewed by canals, was spread opposite the principal hall, from the centre of which started a jet-d'eau that produced a quiet and somniferous effect by the still splashing of its falling spray. As nothing ever interposed to disturb the quiet of this retreat, birds of every feather and colour had chosen it for their abode, and enlivened it by the variety of their notes, and the ceaseless activity of their comings and goings. Occasionally, too, the peacock threw out its discordant cry, giving a double effect of sweetness to the piping of the nightingale, which ever found the most effectual concealment in the dark shades of the cypress wood. In one corner was a spacious aviary, whose gilded wires and spiral columns retained as prisoners numbers of the choicest singing-birds. In the centre of the gardened wood, if it may be so called, was a summer-house of most ingenious construction, made to open on all sides, so that the slightest breeze was sure to find its way into its inmost recesses, and to fan its marbled walls and terraced floors into a delicious coolness. Every object that was beautiful in the eyes of Persians was here collected, and the spot only required a Hafiz to sing its praises, to make its residence equal to the highest flight of their imaginary perfection.

The apartments, too, which the Princess claimed as her own, were so beautiful that they became the theme of admiration and surprise to all those who had been happy enough to see them. In that which she occupied in cold weather, carpets of the most costly manufacture, brought from Cashmere and Herat, were spread, bordered by felts of the softest texture from Hamadan. A corner of it was appropriated to the *courci*,* overlaid with a superb quilt of Cashmerian shawl, covered again by a silken cloth of the most beautiful Chinese design. Around it were cushions of luxurious shapes, large enough for the whole person to recline upon. Covered with the quilt, those who surrounded the *courci* received its grateful warmth in the most convenient posture for repose. Upon the numerous *takchehs*, or architectural recesses, were arranged specimens of the most curious China bowls and vases, as well as every sort of the finest crystal and agate cups. The walls of the apartment were painted in the most beautiful arabesques, enriched

* The *courci* is the *tandour* known in Turkey. It is a low table covered with a quilt, under which a pan of hot ashes is introduced, and spreads an agreeable warmth over the persons of those who sit around it.

with gilding, resembling those minute designs which illuminate the title-pages of oriental manuscripts, and which are peculiar to the taste and execution of Eastern artists. A lustre which had been brought at great expense from Europe by the Shah, the drops of which, when collected together into one design, looked like an immense diamond, was suspended from the ceiling, and added greatly to the effect of the whole arrangement.

It was to this place that the Princess Amima retired during the very cold weather, although she was seldom prevented throwing up the broad sashes of the windows which opened upon her favourite garden, and then, wrapped in the warmest and most costly furs, she sought that luxury without which no Asiatic can enjoy life, namely, the fresh air.

But in warm weather a larger and more open apartment was prepared for her reception, the front of which, instead of being enclosed by glass, was supported by two pillars, curiously carved and gilded, and shaded by an extended curtain, the ends of which were fastened by pegs to the ground. Nothing could be so charming as this place in warm weather. In front was a large marble basin, in the clear water of which were reflected the surrounding trees : on all sides were objects which contributed to coolness, and when the whole was illuminated by the eternal sunshine of these delicious climates, the feelings which the scene inspired were those of unmixed delight and enjoyment.

It was usually in these apartments that the Princess received her uncle the king, whenever he honoured her with a visit. But from his great desire to contribute to her pleasure, he had almost entirely abandoned to her use the high turret and the beautiful pleasure-house at its summit, of which we have already described the situation ; and this was her favourite place of resort. She felt revived at the expanse of country which it commanded. The sight of a large city, always affording so much subject-matter for reflection, was interesting to her in many points of view ; and besides, she was more free from the ceremonial by which her life was more or less surrounded, and which could not so well follow her up the tedious windings of the lofty tower. For she was daily obliged to hold a court, resembling in some measure that which the Shah held, when all

the women of the harem presented themselves before her, standing each according to their rank, to whom she addressed some words of kindness or civility. In the tower she had collected her books, her *kalemdoon*, and writing implements, her guitar, and every thing which could help her to pass her time undisturbed by court intrigues or the disputes of her women. For she took the greatest pleasure in reading the numerous works of imagination and of history, with which the Persian language abounds; and she frequently enjoyed the visits of an old Mollah, one of the most learned men in Asia, with whom she conversed upon subjects much beyond her years. But to do good was her favourite occupation, and she passed a great part of her time in investigating cases of hardship and misery, in soothing the afflicted, in sending clothes to the naked, medicine to the sick, and, more than all, in interposing her good offices with her uncle the Shah, in behalf of the numerous objects perpetually coming under the lash of his displeasure. She was effectually seconded by her waiting-woman, and companion, Mariam, who, although possessing a very considerable share of the imperfections common to her countrywomen, yet had been so tutored into habits of kindness and considerate behaviour, that her mind became almost the mirror in which that of her charming and accomplished mistress was reflected.

Among the numerous objects of her benevolence, one who enjoyed a peculiar share of the princess's care and superintendence, was the widow of the Shah's late chief huntsman. By her desire she had quitted her abode at Firouzkoh for one in the palace itself, where she had been provided for in a manner that bespoke the deep sense which the good heart of Amima entertained of her wrongs.

It evidently had been at Amima's suggestion that her son was appointed to wait upon Zohrab; and on the day after the scene which we have described in the preceding chapter, the boy, elated with the kindness which his master had already shown him, returned to his mother to give an account of himself. "His master," he said, "had promised to become his instructor, to teach him to read and write, and to recite poetry, as well as to make him acquainted with the Persian historians. The confinement likely to ensue from his servitude, was enlivened by a numerous acquaintance of ferashes, executioners, and servants

of all denominations, who thronged the gate of the Nasakchi Bashi, and who all took a great liking to the boy: a friendship which the sequel will show he turned to the best account for the interests of his master. His mother gave thanks to Allah for her son's success, and prepared him to go before the princess. Having decked himself in the new clothes which she had given him, his great desire was to be allowed once more to present himself to her; and such being the received custom after a gift thus conferred, his benefactress did not hesitate in allowing him to approach.

She was seated in the turret-chamber, a little before the call of the noonday prayer, when the boy entered, accompanied by his mother. His *caba* of silk, his new cap of Bokhara lamb's wool, his sash of cloth of gold, and his green shagreen slippers, had so taken up his thoughts, that he almost forgot to make the necessary prostration, and he was only relieved from the embarrassment which his negligence had created both in his mother and himself, by the encouraging smiles of the Princess, who discovered at one glance whence proceeded his blushes and his tardy awkward bow.

"Mashallah!" said she, "Ali is all at once become a man! *Bah! bah! bah!* he must be called Ali Khan for the future; we scarcely can recognize him in those smart clothes."

"May our Khanum's shadow never be less upon her poor slaves!" said the overjoyed mother. "Let her forget our faults—the boy's head goes round and round. We, poor folks! what are we compared to the fineries of a court? all we possess is owing to our Khanum's kindness. Our souls, our lives, are at her disposal."

"Well, Ali," said Amima, "did you go before your master?"

"Yes, so please you," said the boy, who now had fastened his eyes with great attention upon the beautiful face of the Princess. "I went, at your service be it."

"And how were you pleased?" continued the Princess.

"Mashallah!" exclaimed the boy with unreserved confidence, "he is a good and a fine man! he is a good master."

Amima smiled, and looked at Mariam, who smiled in response, and who on this subject more than any other sympathized with her mistress. A pause now took place, which allowed Ali to look about, and as his eye wandered in the direction of the chief

executioner's house and of his master's lodging, he soon recognized the very terrace upon which he had spread the praying-carpet on the preceding evening.

"Well, Ali," said the Princess, "relate how your master treated you."

"*Arzi mi kunum.* Allow me to say," answered the boy, and then, looking away from the Princess towards the terrace, seemed embarrassed how to proceed, his thoughts being taken up by something else.

"Answer," said the anxious mother. "What are you thinking of, Ali?"

"Answer," said Mariam. "Are you turned mad?"

"*Arzi mi kunum,*" said the boy again; and in an embarrassed manner stammered out, "But what did you command?" forgetting what the Princess had asked him.

"What are you thinking of, Ali?" said Amima, in the mildest accent. "You see something below in the city perhaps, which pleases you more than this bird's nest."

"*Astafarallah!* Heaven forbid!" said the boy with much animation; "but your slave thought he could perceive his master walking on the terrace here below."

The Princess visibly turned pale at this disclosure, and then as quickly was suffused with blushes to the very eyes. She could not refrain looking in the direction pointed out by the boy, and there indeed she plainly perceived Zohrab. He was standing with his face towards her, as immovable as a statue. Although she had only seen him once for a few minutes, at their first interview in the desert, yet his air and form were as familiar to her as if she were intimate with him, so much had she accustomed her thoughts to dwell upon his image. She could not look at him for more than a glance at a time; but as soon as she had dismissed the widow and her son, and was left alone with her confidant, she gave free scope to her eyes, and did not cease to gaze at the unfortunate youth, secure in the distance which separated them.

"It is even he," said she to Mariam, after a long pause.

"There is no doubt of that," said the confidant. "How much my heart burns when I consider his situation!"

"What shall we do to restore him to his parents?" said the Princess in an accent of deep feeling. "Can we see the unfor-

tunate, and not try to soothe his misfortunes?—It is our duty to soothe them; that is the true hospitality enjoined by the Prophet."

Little did she know the real state of her heart when she said this. No doubt she felt all she expressed at the time, but little did she foresee the pangs it would cost her, were her intercessions with the Shah to that effect successful. She had hitherto never clearly defined in her mind the sentiment which she felt for him. She took it for pity, and acted up to the principles which that feeling inspired, fully aware how incumbent upon her was the duty of succouring the oppressed and unfortunate. But in so doing, she felt a heaviness of heart, totally different from that alacrity, that cheerfulness which ever accompanied her usual acts of charity and kindness; and she could not account to herself why she so felt. However, she pursued what she thought to be the impulse of her heart, and determined, on the very first visit which her uncle might make her, to entreat him to release his prisoner. This took place very soon; for on the evening of the next day she received an intimation that the king would take his *sham* or evening's meal in the anderoon, and pass the evening in her company.

Accordingly he came. The weather had long been warm enough to enjoy the open air, even after sunset, and the royal meal was spread in the dewan khaneh, where, after it had been dispatched with all the accustomed ceremonial, the Shah ordered his niece to be seated.

Having talked upon indifferent subjects for some time, Amima at length ventured to touch upon the subject of Zohrab's confinement.

"I have one supplication to make," said she. "I am but a woman, it is true, and know nothing of state affairs; but this I know, that no king can do wrong who makes clemency one of the leading principles of his conduct."

"Speak," said the king, whose face bespoke as much good-humour as it was possible for it to show; for whenever he visited his niece it was remarked, that it was in order either to enjoy the good-humour of which he was at that moment in actual possession, or to seek it. He was now in actual possession.

"Speak," said he, "there is no harm in that."

"My supplication is this," said the Princess: "that you no

longer separate a son from his parents—that you release from captivity an innocent man—that you behave towards him as a great king ought, with magnanimity, and trust in his honour that he no more disturbs Irân—in short, that you set Zohrab Khan at liberty."

"My niece," said the Shah, without acrimony, "are you mad? Do you not reflect that by letting this hot-head loose, I lay the train for future bloodshed, and for all those mischiefs which you so constantly wish to avoid? Never, my niece, lay aside this leading rule for a statesman; let it be the guide of your reason in deciding matters of general import; it is one which some give to Zerdusht, although others say it came from the Chinese Confutzee. It is, 'never to let the heart take the lead of the understanding.' It may seem harsh, but in the end its results are the most charitable."

"It is good, if well applied," said Amima; "but if abused, is only an apology for the greatest cruelty."

The Shah, perhaps not wishing to perceive how strongly this applied to his own conduct, continued. "But our intentions towards Zohrab are friendly. He is a man of merit, and the hand of protection shall be extended towards him. Steps shall be taken to attach him to our government. We have ordered that he be treated with kindness and respect; moreover, we have ordered that a house be given him; and to attach him more to our service, that he receive a wife at our hands."

Amima was in no manner prepared for such a result to her application, and had she not turned away her head, the rush of confusion to her face would have betrayed her feelings. In vain she attempted to compose her looks, and to assume an air of indifference; the shock of such a piece of intelligence was too great for her feelings, and she remained intensely agitated.

At this moment very opportunely entered the Khajeh Bashi, who having made his prostrations, and leaving his shoes at a distance, stood by the brink of the basin of water.

"What has happened?" said the Shah.

"I am your sacrifice," said the Khajeh, "I went and saw."

"What sort of a person is she?" continued the Shah.

"As I am the slave of the asylum of the world, she is not bad. I will not lie: on the contrary, I will say the truth; she is a fine person—eyes large, waist small, body tall."

"What is her name?" said the king.

"At the service of the king of kings, Zulma."

"Did you say that it was our intention to marry her to the hostage?" said the Shah.

"Yes, as I am your slave," answered the Khajeh.

"What said she?" said the king.

"She said, as I am your slave, 'Upon my eyes, upon my head be it! we kiss the dust of your footsteps—we are grateful. Whatever the Shah commands, even unto death, we are ready!' She said thus much."

"There is no harm in that," said the Shah. "Well, now go to the Hajji" (for so he usually called Hajji Ibrahim, his prime minister), "and tell him all that you have seen and heard, and forthwith order him to lay our commands upon the Mazanderani youth, that he take this woman to wife. Let his head touch the skies with this information, and as soon as the wedding shall have been celebrated, let him be brought before us. Our condescension shall await him."

"Upon my eyes be it!" said the courteous eunuch; and bowing his lowest prostration, straight left the presence.

Amima by this time had been able to overcome her confusion, although she had learned things the most inimical to her peace of mind. She had learned who was her rival. The name of Zulma, the most hated woman in Tehran, had come upon her like a bolt from heaven; her whole frame was thrown into a state of revulsion; her ideas became so confused that she could scarcely listen with common attention to what the Shah said; and she would instantly have left his presence, had she not been afraid to commit herself before him.

"Now you have seen," said the Shah, "to what extent our condescension to Zohrab reaches. He marries the daughter of our chief executioner, a person whose hand would be coveted by the first men of my gate."

"Yes," said the Princess, almost mechanically.

"Is that all you say?" exclaimed the Shah; "we expected to have made our face white before you for having shown so much kindness to one who expects death."

"God only knows," said the broken-spirited maiden, "what is good or what is bad! We are the beings of his bounty, blind

until he openeth our eyes, and ignorant of what is best for us. Allah grant that all the Shah does may advance his glory!"

The Shah was surprised at this language, thinking in reality that he had performed a feat for which he deserved to be placed on the same musnud as Noushirvan the Just. His suspicious nature would have taken the alarm, and he probably would have read the heart of his niece in its true meaning, had not her serious interposition for the dismissal of Zohrab effectually lulled any suspicion. Besides, he was so much in the habit of submitting himself to her entreaties, whenever she pleaded the cause of the offender, that he was delighted to find that on this occasion he had been allowed to come off victorious. But it must not be forgotten, that, had any other person in his dominions ventured to call his acts into question, the being now apparently so docile and accommodating, would have been roused into one more resembling the beast of prey than one possessed of reason.

After he had passed his usual time in the company of his niece, whose impatience for his absence began to be almost perceptible, he arose, and returned to his own apartments.

When the maiden was left to herself, she gave way to a violent flood of tears, for then all at once was revealed to her, in a manner not to be misunderstood, the strength and intensity of her love for the unfortunate Zohrab; then she discovered that what she took for pity was affection, and that when she intended to secure his freedom and absence, she had in fact deceived herself by a hollow act of benevolence.

Then she exclaimed, "Oh, woe is me! Oh, Zohrab, Zohrab, why did I ever know thee! Cruel, cruel *takdeer!* to make a being once so happy as I was, now so wretched! See thy works! One man there is in the world whom I could love unto death, and he is given to the one woman in the world whom all hate!" Upon that, as if anxious to steal from her own reflexions, she made her way to the turret-top, and there took her station. The first object which met her eager eyes was Zohrab, standing on the terrace of his house, apparently looking towards her. The light of the moon shone so brilliantly upon him, that it was impossible to mistake him; and could their respective thoughts and feelings have met in the intervening air, there

very probably would have taken place that spiritual communication which may be the portion of the blessed in another and a more refined state of being.

Amima had not remained long in the turret ere she was joined by her confidant, who having missed the Princess at the usual time of going to rest, sought her where she was wont to repair. Her quick eye soon informed her how she was employed. Hitherto she had never been aware of the full extent of her mistress's feelings for the captive; but now her eyes were completely opened. Amima had refrained from making any confidence on that subject to Mariam, and she now was more cautious than ever how she mentioned him; but Mariam had become convinced that her affections were deeply engaged, and consequently her conduct was greatly guided by that conviction.

As soon as Amima perceived her attendant standing before her, she abruptly returned to her apartment, scarcely uttering a word. She hastened the business of preparing for rest as much as possible, and as soon as she had got rid of her attendant's services, and was left to herself, gave way to the current of her thoughts. She then seriously considered the respective situations of herself and her lover, and the result was the total hopelessness of a passion which, if continued to be entertained, must end in their ruin and misery. It was long before she could take courage to throw from her mind the pleasing illusion of ultimately being united to him for whom she could lay down her life. She soon recollect ed the situation of constraint in which a Persian maiden is placed, both by religion and propriety, and particularly one in her peculiar circumstances. Zohrab, it is true, was eligible, in point of birth and station, to the possession of her hand; but the question was, would her uncle ever think him so? This became a matter of doubt, and she could not help clinging to the hope that some event might take place to bring about the former friendship which had existed between Zohrab's father and her uncle. Then, on a sudden, reprehending herself for entertaining such feelings, she exclaimed, "but what do I say? Who am I that he should ever think of me? Perhaps in his eyes I may be less than the dust of the field." This train of thought led her to form new resolutions to regain her self-possession, and she determined again to persuade the Shah to restore him to his parents, as the best means, at once

to perform an act of justice, and to relieve herself from the neighbourhood of a temptation hurtful to the rectitude of her conduct and to the quiet of her mind.

But my gentle readers, if ever they have been caught in the snare in which our heroine was entangled, will not require from her more heroism than our frail natures can well endure, and will forgive her for that vacillation of feeling which must inevitably ensue (excepting in minds of a higher order) when inclination is placed on one side and a sense of duty on the other; and in that state we must for the present leave her, requesting the reader also to bear in mind that her confidant, now fully in possession of her secret, loving her mistress above all things, and favourably inclined to the object of her affections, did all to advance and nothing to repress what she deemed to be the ardent object of her wishes.

CHAPTER XII.

When men are vile and tempers hot,
Then look for plot and counterplot.

ZOHRAB passed the whole of his time on the terrace of his apartment. His imagination was entirely wrapped up in visions of hope, that the same destiny which had made him acquainted with the object of his love would also give him possession of her. How that was ever to come to pass, was, to all appearance, so impossible, that any one less sanguine might have rejected all hope in despair; but many circumstances tended to cherish the feeling which now entirely possessed him. His servant Ali had related to him the manner in which the Princess had been informed of his presence on the terrace, and of the facility with which she could look upon him. He himself had so practised his eye in remarking whenever any movement took place in the turret, that he could almost at once say whether the corner,

blessed in his estimation by the presence of his adored, was vacant or no; and having, as he thought, almost discovered, even by the light of the moon, motions of the head flattering to his passion, he now scarcely knew what rest was.

He had passed a sleepless night; his mind was jaded by feelings of the most various character, and life was almost become a gift of no value, when the door of his solitary dwelling was thrown open, the clatter of many iron-heeled slippers was heard in the court, and the Grand Visir in person was announced.

After the usual compliments, the vizir said, "Zehrab Khan, this is a fortunate hour. I must require a *mujdehlük** from you."

"How!" exclaimed the youth, with great alacrity of manner, "what has happened?"

"See!" said the vizir, holding out a letter to him which he drew from his girdle, "this is worth a *mujdehlük*. It comes from Asterabad."

"Wallah!" exclaimed the overjoyed youth, as if a light from heaven had suddenly shone upon him: "Does it, by Allah?" Then at once forgetting every other feeling, he seized with thankfulness upon the letter, and devoured its contents with trembling anxiety. It was easy to trace the workings of affection in his countenance as he perused his father's letter. Home and all its endearments were immediately presented to his imagination in their most glowing colours; and tears started into his eyes as he read the narrative of his mother's sufferings at his supposed loss, and of her joy at receiving the tidings of his safety.

The good-natured minister did not interrupt feelings to which the perusal of this letter had given rise, but allowed its contents to be fully understood; then he said, in a playful manner, "I have still another present to exact for good news; for we learn that your honoured father is himself proceeding in person to the foot of the throne. Our embassy to him has, thanks to Allah and the Prophet! been successful. He accedes to the Shah's proposals, and comes."

Zohrab listened with serious interest to the vizir's words, and

* *Mujdehlük* is a present conferred on those who bring good news.

without expressing either joy or sorrow at the intelligence, merely said, "To me also he sends this news. God grant that whatever he and his friends may determine, may be for the best, and more than all, that my situation may not have biased their judgement!"

"Have no anxiety for the future, my friend," said Hajji Ibrahim; "God is great! God is merciful! The destimes of his creatures are in his hand; therefore, why should we have a thought for the morrow? The Shah moreover has announced his *shefakat*, his good feeling, towards you. He wishes to make you his own. He has sent a message to you, Zohrab Khan."

"Upon my eyes be it," said Zohrab, "if within my power! May the king's condescension never be less!"

"Open then your ears. You are young. You are, Mashallah! a man, and in truth entirely a man. The well-being of Irân requires that men of your merit should enter into the Shah's service; a Kizailbash like you must not be the servant of cows of Turcomans. Whatever you require he will give you! and to begin with one instance of his condescension, he bestows upon you a wife. You may well open your eyes. Yea, the Shah sends you a wife from his own fortunate hands."

"Did you say a wife, O Khan?" inquired Zohrab, with looks of amazement. "I! what shall I do with a wife?"

"What words are these?" said the vizir; "to settle in life man wants a partner, according as our holy religion has decreed. The king orders you to marry, and such a wife whom it is not the lot of every man to possess."

"And who may she be?" said Zohrab, with a faltering accent

"She is your immediate neighbour," said the vizir.

The youth's colour came and went as he anxiously waited the word.

"She is Zulma, the chief executioner's daughter," continued the vizir. "Such another person does not exist in the world. The mistress of beauty, of accomplishments, and of activity; she is unrivalled among the maidens of Irân."

Upon hearing the name of Zulma, Zohrab's heart turned back upon him, for he could think of no other name than Amima, and his disappointment and perplexity becoming great, he did not know what to say. The news which he had re-

ceived from home, added to the Shah's message, had taken him so much unawares, that he knew not what face to put upon it, and he therefore entreated the vizir to allow him a short time to consider upon what had just been communicated to him. "But," said he, "with respect to the daughter of the chief executioner, however grateful I may be for the Shah's condescension, however I may admire her perfections, and however much I may feel honoured by being selected for her husband, yet, O Khan! see, can a broken man like me think of marrying? You, who are a wise vizir, one who knows the fitness of things, can I think of a house and a home when I am here a captive and a hostage, uncertain of my father's wishes and of his future fate?"

"Every thing becomes fitting," answered the vizir, "to one who enjoys the Shah's protection and goodwill. Go, Zohrab Khan, do not think so ill of your own situation; the highest offices in the state are open to you, and with time and opportunity there is nothing to which a man of your merit may not aspire. I will report to the Shah what has passed, and will say that after a little consideration you will give him your answer?"

Upon this the vizir took his departure, and left our hero in a very perplexed state of mind. The letter which he had received from his father alone gave him ample cause for reflection. What would be the results of his visit to the Shah? Was it possible that he and the Turcomans could have decided upon bowing the knee and claiming the skirt of one whom they so entirely contemned as the present ruler of Persia? He thought that impossible; and he felt sure that but for his unfortunate captivity this never could have taken place. He deplored his fate, at having thus become the source of such extensive mischief; and he then asked himself, would it not be worse than folly, would it not be wickedness in the extreme, to hearken to the Shah's flattering invitation to marry and settle in his service, before he knew what might be the full scope of his father's schemes? for schemes he was sure he had, which ultimately would tend to emancipate him from the yoke of Persia. And then, when all his feelings for the adored of his heart rushed back upon him, he started at the bare idea of being united to any other. He said to himself, "If my good

where be the blessing of Allah !) and were taken up in the duty of your slave's office, that he said—*Goozoo*, * Zohrab, the Mazanderani, has not his equal. Let Ferdusi talk of his Rustam, and of his Afrasiab; who has performed the feats of our Zohrab ? It was destined among the glorious events of my reign to possess so valiant a subject ! He said so, by your soul !”

The youth bowed, and smiled in surprise at what this pre-amble was likely to bring forth.

“ ‘ After all, I am a king,’ ” said the humpback, continuing to quote the Shah, “ ‘ and wherefore should I not do with my subjects what may seem best to me ? I will make Zohrab happy ! ’ He said so, by your father’s soul ! ‘ I will exalt his dignity, I will give him a house, I will give him money, I will give him slaves, I will give him a wife ! ’ By the king’s soul ! by the king’s salt ! by the beard of the Prophet ! ” exclaimed this crafty and plotting liar, “ the Shah said so ! Upon this make your mind perfectly easy. Now, every thing is ready ; the house is ready, the slaves are ready, the money is ready, and the wife is ready. After this, what is there wanting ? Nothing but a fortunate hour ; and to find one the best and the most fitting, leave your slave alone ! Praise be to God, we also are not without our modicum of wit.”

“ You have forgot one more requisite in this affair,” said Zohrab, with a suppressed smile.

“ What may that be, light of my eyes ? ” eagerly inquired the humpback.

“ Only the consent of the principal party concerned, namely, your humble servant,” said Zohrab.

“ What words are these ! ” said the other, somewhat surprised at the observation. “ Is not the will of the Shah conclusive ? Besides, can it be that one of your wit, your judgment, your perfections, would reject advantages that every ass would see at first sight were unequalled ? Do not make difficulties when every thing is easy ; do not throw rocks on the highway when it is as even as my hand.”

“ Hear my words, said Zohrab, with great resolution in his manner and countenance ; “ I am but young in the ways of the

* *Goozoo*, a humpback.

world, and I only know one road through it, and that is the straight road. Whoever you may be, I will speak as plainly to you as I have to every one else on this subject. I own no master, after Allah and our holy Prophet, save my father. May the king's shadow never be less, notwithstanding ! I am grateful for his kind intentions towards me ; but my father is my king, as he is my parent. It will not be long ere he arrive, and then whatever he may ordain for his son, that will I do, with the blessing of God."

This straight-forward language, so different from the deceitful phraseology of intrigue to which the humpback was accustomed, disconcerted the negotiator for a few minutes, during which there was a dead silence ; but not willing to be foiled, he returned to the charge, hoping, by a description of the person rejected, to inflame the youthful imagination of his hearer. "But you do not know upon what you turn your back when you refuse the daughter of this house. O man, she is a virgin without compare!—such eyes, such a complexion, such a person have not been seen in Irán since the days of the famous Shireen, or the still more famous Zuleika. Why will you not let your good fortune throw its *kalaat* over you ? Ass must be written on the brow of the man who turns his back upon happiness. If you are ever to have a wife, reject not her whose look is like lightning, whose smile is like the dawn, whose mouth is the seat of love, who inflames the earth by her looks, and calms it by the readiness of her wit. Oh, my Aga ! open your eyes well before you give a denial to that which you cannot fail to regret."

"Were I to be tempted by words," said Zohrab, "certainly yours would more than perform that office. Let me, however, say again, that at present I can as little retract my resolution as I can take the wife. If the Shah deigns to inquire after one so wretched as I, as you are a good mussulman, say that I pray his house may prosper, and that his shadow may continue to be extended over his slave ; but add, that, by your head ! by the salt of the Shah ! and by the soul of my father ! Zukma to me must ever be nothing!"

When the humpback perceived that all his arts of persuasion had failed, and that he was foiled in his scheme, the expression of his face became that of an assassin ; he could have plunged

a dagger into the heart of his victim, and drunk his blood. He slowly rose from his seat, and said between his teeth, "Hitherto you have not known who the Goozoo is; he is the despised of men, but, thank Allah, he is feared by them! Know!" said he, with great emphasis, "know, Zohrab Khan, that if Iran has one king, she also has one humpback."

"And know also," said the unconcerned youth, "that there is a God in Heaven, and that we, *Alham du lillah*, thanks to Allah! fear neither humpback nor Shah."

Upon which this interview ceased; the foiled intriguer departed with anger and future plot in his heart, whilst the man firm in rectitude continued careless of the future, and secure in his own integrity.

The humpback immediately repaired to the daughter of the chief executioner, in order to give her a report of the ill success of his mission. He was admitted without demur into every harem in the city; but the moment he appeared in this, he was received with distinguished attention, so well was he known to be the friend and confidant of its mistress. He found Zulma descending the steps of the terrace, where she had been, with all characteristic impatience, watching his exit from Zohrab's apartment. She did not wait for the formality of taking post on the carpets of an apartment, but at once made him crouch down near her behind a thick rose-tree, and thus accosted him.

"You look disturbed, my Aga," said she; "Is it to be, or is it not? Speak, I am sick at heart from expectation."

"What can I say, my khanum?" answered the deformity; "the heart of that man is as impenetrable as the jungles of his country. He looks upon us as *pooch*—nothing."

"Is it so?" said the haughty maiden, colouring through her brilliant brown skin, her eyes flashing a sentiment made up of rage and disappointment. "Are we then nothing in the world, that I am to be despised by an unsainted Mazanderani? Am I not then that Zulma who creates fear and love at pleasure? say, Goozoo, say, am I less than nothing?"

"May his liver turn upon him!" exclaimed the humpback.

"Look at these eyes," said the offended maiden, with warmth, "are they not bright—are these lips not red—are my teeth less than pearls, and is my hair rivalled by that of other maidens? Are these arms nothing?—is my shape to be despised? Speak

then, man," as she seized her hearer's sleeve, "did you describe all this to him, and did he still tell you his heart was stone?"

"Whatever was necessary I said," answered the humpback; "for, thanks to the Prophet, I am not without wit. I cannot say whether his sense has fled, for in truth he is a man of accomplishment; but certain it is, that he cares neither for the Shah nor his power, and says he is the servant alone of Allah and his father."

"What shall we do?" said the downcast maiden; "it is true, he has not seen me, and as yet, to him I am a stranger."

"We must make a thought," said the humpback, with looks of reflection, at the same time seizing his chin with his hand; "there are many things to be done by those who have the Shah on their side. We shall be fools, indeed, if we cannot find among us invention enough to make a Rustam like this youth fall in love with the choicest of Irân's virgins."

"It would not do," said Zulma doubtfully, afraid to give utterance to her thought, "for a Persian girl to go in person to the Mazanderani youth?"

"The time is not yet come," answered her counsellor; "you must have patience, or our business will fail. Let me work in your service. I have not only mortals at my command, but, as you know, the heavens and stars are in my service. The Shah would indeed have selected a fool for his chief adviser," said he, with an air of importance, "if the Goozoo is not able to bring that about by art which ought to have been long accomplished by natural means."

"Would it not do to release him from his confinement, to show him friendship, to introduce him into our house, and thus give us an opportunity of meeting?" said the thoughtful Zulma.

"Allah, Allah!" exclaimed her friend, "you do not know this youth. He is one of those who do not return upon their word: who, if they have once settled that death is better than life, will die, and say thanks to God for it. No, we must wind round and round him, as the tiger does before it falls upon the hind."

"But think on me, man!" exclaimed Zulma, rather disconcerted by this circuitous scheme. "Am I to sit in a corner smokink the *kalioon* of expectation, whilst you are making your magic circles?"

"For the love of the Prophet!" said the humpback, "be for

once like a man, and not a woman ; help me, and do not thwart what now passes in my head. I only ask patience of you."

" But you ask that" said Zulma, " of which I am not the mistress, not even for a moment, and of which all women are bankrupt. Speak of patience to those who sit in corners and want nothing, but not to a woman in love."

At the word love, the hideous barber gave a look of contempt, showing in what estimation he held those who allowed themselves to be enslaved by it ; and then paused, as if he had hit upon some good scheme. " I have it, I have it," said he ; " I have made a plan which will not fail of producing its proper effect. Leave the Goozoo to his wit, and it will work like a talisman."

" What has happened ?" said Zulma, with eagerness in her look. " Speak, for my soul is withered with expectation ?"

Upon this he drew nearer to her, and then looking about him, as if he were fearful of being overheard, whispered his scheme of future operations in her ear : to which, lending the profoundest attention, she occasionally shook her head, as if disapproving of what he proposed, and then again nodded consent ; although when he had done, there were visible signs of disappointment in her manner and expression.

The conference being at an end, they parted ; he, bent upon putting his project into execution, made the best haste towards the palace, whilst she, anxious as to its result, retreated to her own apartment.

CHAPTER XIII.

Vour, beat; votresdn, let him beat; vouralem, let us beat; vourün, beat ye; voursünlar, let them beat.

VIGUER'S TURKISH GRAMMAR.

THE Shah had passed a disturbed and sleepless night. Such an event, proceeding very frequently from indigestion and an unpropitious stomach, was always rumoured about the court and even

the city with dismay. This was usually accompanied by acts of cruelty and violence, and in proportion as the disorder had destroyed the equanimity of the mind, so were the results more or less fatal. The humpback, who was always a close observer of signs, knew to a certainty by the position of the wrinkles on the faces of the ferashes and other attendants upon the king, what was the temper in which his majesty had risen. He accordingly knew how to shape his own conduct and speech; in the act of shaving he knew what part of the head he might venture to take liberties with, and with what he ought to deal delicately. In good-tempered days he would play with impunity with the one or two hairs which grew about the chin and cheeks: when the indignation was raging and the temper hot, he carefully abstained from trespass on the irritable parts, and just glanced lightly over those spots which might lead to an explosion.

Approaching the person on the present occasion, he soon discovered that all was not right. Sadek was standing thoughtfully lounging along the anteroom, with one hand stuck in his girdle and one foot against the wall. Hashim's vivacity had forsaken him, and the chief physician, the Hakim Bashi, was about taking his departure with his eye-brows running under his cap, with an air of apprehension that might have suited some wretch on the verge of life and death.

The expert barber, deeply learned in all the circumstances of time, place, and opportunity, crept almost unnoticed into his master's presence. He found him in fact looking like an impending thunderstorm. The countenance was every where lowering, the flashes of the eye were various, cross, and uncertain, the tone of voice was hoarse and portentous. As soon as he perceived the operator, he broke out into invective.

"Where have you been?" said he in anger, "you crooked dog, you apology for a man? Is the Shah to wait for your razor as he would for the day of judgment?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said the barber with great coolness, preparing the shaving materials at the same time, "the sun has not yet risen, and your majesty is generally not out of the bath till half an hour past. Your slave has been in readiness since the dawn."

"What has the sun or the dawn to do with the head of the Shah? You old no man, do your work and no more."

Upon this the humpback began his usual operation, thoughts filling his mind, whilst it became convenient for him to be sparing of his words. In fact, he saw that no opportunity could be so fitting as the present for introducing the scheme which he had planned, in order to bring on the marriage of Zohrab with Zulma. He therefore calmly waited for the usual question, which he knew would not fail to come from the Shah, of "What news is there to day?" before he ventured to lead the conversation into any new channel.

"*Cheh haber est?* what news is there in the city to-day?" said the king.

"As I am your sacrifice," said the barber, hesitatingly, "there is nothing at your service——but"

"But what?" said the Shah, "if there is a *but* there is news; what has happened?"

"Men say," said the humpbach, "that the Mazanderani has given his answer to the Nasakchi Bashi; he won't have his daughter."

"Given his answer!" said the king, almost choking, whilst his ghastly head, half shaved and half lathered, exhibited a result of most unseemly form and colouring. "What answer has he to give? has he not the Shah's order? therefore who wants his answer?"

"So it is said," answered the barber, proceeding apparently in great unconcern with his work; "by all accounts 'tis a youth of crooked conduct."

"Where did you hear this?" said the king; "none of the ill-favoured, whose duty it is to report this, have yet spoken, how do you then know it?"

"May I be your sacrifice," said the humpback, "the Nasakchi Bashi was afraid to lay his representations at the foot of the Shah until he had tried every means of success, and therefore commissioned your slave to speak to the youth. Your slave did speak, but he treated me with the same degree of contempt that he did your majesty's chief executioner."

"And he refused to obey my commands?" said the Shah with great vivacity tearing one of the napkins from under his chin.

"He did," said the barber.

"And what did the unsainted youth say?" replied the king with the same warmth.

"He said," said the crafty intriguer, "that is, after I had urged the royal commands, after I had dwelt upon the unheard-of condescension of the Shah, the prospects that were opening to him of advancement and protection, the charms of the individual herself, the honours without calculation that were thus heaped upon him—he said, all that might be very good, but as for the commands of the Shah, they were of no avail with him, since he had but one king to whom he owed all his obedience, and that was his own father."

"Did he say so? By the head of the king, swear," roared out the grim monarch; "let the men of Irân spit in my face, and tell me I am not their Shah, if this burnt father's whelp does not rue this before to-day's noon. And so he calls his unclean father 'king?' King, indeed! I will defile such a king's father's grave. Call hither the execution's gang. Tell Sadek to come before us."

The wily barber having now worked upon the Shah's passions beyond what he had intended as serviceable to his purpose, found that it became necessary to lower them a few degrees, and to this end he said with hesitation, still slowly fumbling over the head upon which he had operated—

"*Be chekm*, upon my eyes be it!"

"Go then," exclaimed the enraged king—"go, call the ferashes, and call also the chief executioner."

"Your slave goes; but he has but one representation to make before he goes. Shall the Prime Vizir know your majesty's wishes?" said the barber with great diffidence.

This in some measure lowered the king's impetuosity, and after a moment's reflection, he said with petulance, "What may that be to you, you old dog? What is the Vizir to you, or you to the Vizir?"

"Your slave is less than an ounce of dust," said the cringing barber, "but the Prime Vizir may possibly wish to avert the punishment which the asylum of the universe may deem it right to inflict upon this disobedient miscreant."

"Well," said the Shah, "and then—"

"If it were inflicted at the Nasakchi Bashi's house in private,

instead of making it a public exhibition, every object would be secured; the Shah's orders would be executed, and your slave humbly conceives all would go right."

The angry monarch upon hearing this, held his peace, and allowed the operation of shaving to be finished without a word more being spoken; but just as the barber had secured his apparatus, and was about taking his leave, he said, "Send hither the chief executioner."

The Humpback lost no time in obeying this command, for he knew the jealous nature of his master, who could adopt a hint received in private, whilst he would reject a piece of advice given in public, because it did not originate with himself, and he felt in this instance that the Shah would not fail to issue his commands in consonance with his advice.

The chief executioner had no sooner appeared than the Shah said to him, "It is evident that you are one of those ill-begotten knaves who think it right to keep truth locked up in the chest until it comes out of the key-hole. Why have you not informed us of the disobedience of the Mazanderani youth?"

The man of blows was so much taken aback by this abrupt accusation, that he had scarcely time to stroke down his beard preparatory to an answer, when the Shah again said, "We know all that has happened—whether it be for life or death, for joy or grief, for ruin or prosperity, our orders are positive, and you know that we do not make a joke of our decrees. *Bero, go!* we give the Mazanderani but one chance more. Say to him, the Shah sends you this alternative, punishment or marriage. If he agrees to marry, 'tis well—call the musicians—make ready the dower—prepare the feast—and, in the name of Allah! let the wedding be. But should he persist in refusing your daughter, then bring forth the *felek* and the sticks; collect your strongest ferashes, and let them strike till you can't tell one foot from another. When that is done, let me know. We are upon our musnud, and are an absolute Shah! Go!"

"*Be cheshm!* upon my eyes be it!" said the Nasakchi Bashi, and making a solemn prostration, took his leave. He hastened home, swelling with consequence at the confidence which was thus placed in him, and full of malignant satisfaction at the revenge which he was about to take upon him who had rejected his daughter's charms. "The king is a king, 'tis true,"

said he to himself, "but I am his chief executioner, and I have a musnud to sit upon as well as he." No sooner had he reached home than he ordered the dewan khaneh, or saloon in his principal court-yard, to be got in readiness, the curtain before it spread out, the fountain to be set playing, and a thick musnud to be doubled up in the corner, for himself to sit upon in his utmost state. The humpback by this time had arrived, and having excited the ardour of the executioner by some hints of his own, he immediately visited his daughter in the harem, to inform her of what was about to take place, and to make her prepare for the tragedy which was on the eve of performance.

All was now in readiness; the ferashes, each with a powerful green poplar stick in his hand, stood in solemn silence round the basin; the awful *felek* lay in front upon the ground; the savage executioner was seated at his post; the humpback was crouched on the carpet some two yards further off; when the deputy executioner was ordered to produce before the assembled party the person of the prisoner Zohrab.

After a pause of sufficient length to allow the prisoner to be brought from his own apartment to the place of violence, during which time little was heard, excepting the bubbling sounds of the kalion which the Khan smoked in great dignity, the unfortunate Zohrab made his appearance. When he came near, no invitation did he receive to sit, a common civility due to his rank; he saw nothing to conciliate, but every thing told him that violence was in contemplation.

Standing face to face to the chief executioner, the one in the court, the other seated at the open pillared front, Zohrab received not even a word of civility, but the first phrase which struck his ear was as follows, delivered in the most brutal of voices:

"I who am the chief executioner, on the part of the Shah, the king of kings and asylum of the universe, am ordered to ask you for the last time, whether you will obey his orders, marry the lady Zulma, and become his servant, as proposed by the Prime Vizir. If you agree, your head shall touch the skies—the city shall ring with revelry—a wedding will take place such as has not been seen in Tehran for years, and Zohrab Khan, with a firman in his cap, and the most beautiful maid of Irân in his anderoon, will be the happiest and most envied of men; but

if you refuse, here is the *felok*, there the ferashes ; I who am the executor of the Shah's commands, am here also ; and such a bastinado will ensue, that there shall not be branches enough upon the trees, or arms strong enough to wield them, ere I cry hold. Speak ! in the name of Allah ! speak."

As soon as Zohrab had in some measure recovered from the state of amazement into which this abrupt speech had thrown him, indignation at finding himself thus situated and thus addressed, rose uncontrolled in his breast, and he exclaimed, "Men without souls ! miscreants ! instruments of a lawless tyrant ! ye less than dogs ! will you frighten me by your base proposal ? Whatever I have said, I have said. Your daughter, iniquitous old man ! I know not. I have never seen her. She may be all and more than she has been described to me. I therefore have nothing to say against her ; but were she beautiful as Shireen, pure as a heavenly Houri, and excellent as the blessed Mariamne,* forced upon me as she is in this manner, I would reject her ; aye, if I had a thousand tongues in my head to repeat what the one which God has given me now says, I would repeat that I will not have her—that I reject her—that I reject the Shah and his service, and that I call upon you all, miscreants and wretches that you are, to do your worst."

As soon as those who were assembled heard these words, those who had beards stroked them, and all pulled up their mustaches. The ferashes seized their sticks in the proper place for striking, and seemed to await the order with impatience to fall upon their victim. The humpback threw a scowl over his satanic features, as indicating how much he would strike if it were his business so to do, and the Nasakchi Bashi himself at once asserted his office and offended dignity, by throwing his cap on one side of his head, placing his hands on either hip, and raising himself on his heels, exclaimed, "Did ye hear, O men ! did ye hear the words of this madman ? If he will eat abomination, that is his business, not ours. We are the Shah's servants—our duty is to obey his orders. Seize him, in the name of Allah ! and lay on."

Upon this two of the stoutest stepped forward to lay violent

* Mahomedans revere the Virgin Mary, whom they call *Mariamne*.

hands upon the youth. As they approached him, he exclaimed, "Stand off! I will cede to nothing but superior force." They still approached, when seizing one by the neck, he threw him with tremendous force on the ground; and taking the other by the girdle, impelled him forward in the air as if he had been a ball. Never yet had this undaunted youth exhibited his strength before the Persians, and this specimen of his prowess excited a pause in their proceedings against him, no volunteer among them being willing to venture a second seizure. Zohrab stood like a lion at bay; his noble countenance animated by indignation and contempt of his assailants, seemed to say, "Give me more fitting antagonists, let me have a fair struggle for life, and I am content to die." The idea that he was doomed to be ignobly beaten like a common malefactor, lashed up his feelings of pride into frenzy; and had a thousand such as those assembled before him, proceeded to assail him, he seemed prepared to encounter them all single-handed. At length the Nasakchi Bashi, seeing that no one appeared inclined to put the king's commands into execution, rose from his seat, and said in a loud voice, "What is this? a pair of feet to be beaten, and twenty pair of hands unable to do it? Children of burnt fathers! seize him, or by the beard of the Prophet, by the Shah's head, I with my own hand will cut each of your heads off, one by one."

"We have had to do with men hitherto," said one of the hurled louts, slowly rising from the throw he had received, "but this is a devil."

"This is Rustam in person," said the other; "we can attack any thing that Persians can produce, but whoever thought of facing this Mazanderani?"

The humpback then arose, and with the eye of a beast of prey glancing on its victim, stepped forward, and roared out in a voice of thunder—"Ye call yourselves the Shah's servants, ye unsainted cowards! and are afraid of one man. Go, seize and tie the wretch with a double tie in the *felek*." Upon this there was a simultaneous movement among the ferashes, headed by their deputy, for the purpose of seizing Zohrab. The various sounds of "seize him! strike him! burn his father! attack his mother! cut his head off! let me go! go you!" and many such, came from the assailants, whilst the repeated cries of "Stand

off ! Have you no shame, cowards ?—I'll slay the first who advances," from Zohrab's animated voice, was heard ever and anon, like the discharges of heavy ordnance amidst the din of small arms. The advancing party had now surrounded their victim ; he had thrown one or two down, others had seized his arms, more threw themselves upon him ; the chiefs were urging their men on ; the gallant youth was about being overpowered, when the small gate of the harem was thrown violently open, and a female, closely veiled, but of exquisite form and grace, ran swiftly forward, exclaiming, as she ran, " Hold, desist !—Oh you men of nought—cowards ! I, who am a woman, attack me, not that lion ;" then joining in the fray, she pulled one away, seized another by the arm, accosted the chief, spoke violently to the humpback, until she succeeded to draw off the whole gang, leaving Zohrab alone, breathless with exertion though unbroken in spirit. During her efforts to release Zohrab, her veil had partly fallen off, and she exhibited to his view a face beaming with animation, with intense vigour of expression, and possessing every beauty that belongs to imperious looks and great dignity of demeanour. Her eyes spoke strong passion without softness, her mouth beautifully formed was compressed, as if unaccustomed to smile ; her brow, which would have bespoken the tragic muse, was severe though majestic, and the whole outline of her head and person was made to inspire admiration, but admiration without love. Thus were Zulma and Zohrab brought face to face. Zohrab's first impulse was to turn his eyes towards his deliverer, and though he at once discovered to whom he was indebted for his release, and in how awkward a position he stood towards her, yet he had presence of mind enough, aided by his natural civility of manner, to surmount the disgust which her conduct, however flattering to himself, ought to create in his breast, and to express, with looks of profound respect and gratitude, how thankful he was for her interference. To describe her expressive looks at this moment, varied by a host of contending emotions, perhaps would be impossible ;—there was truth in the whole of her zeal in favour of the man she had protected, although it was founded on the falseness of a concerted intrigue. She would have spoken, but the strangeness of her position deprived her of the power of utterance. What she principally

desired was to hear the voice of the man she loved pouring out the effusion of his gratitude to her. She scarcely heeded the astonished looks of the bystanders—the angry countenance of her father, fearful of remissness in his duty, yet still more apprehensive of the violence of his daughter; the band of executioners retreating before a woman, and knowing not what countenance to keep on so unheard-of a proceeding: and lastly, the wily Humpback, fully prepared for the scene which had taken place by previous arrangement, and laughing in his sleeve to find that his scheme worked so entirely in the manner he had intended.

Matters could not remain long in this state, and accordingly many seconds did not elapse ere the responsible chief, the Nasakchi Bashi, exclaimed to his daughter—"I am indeed surprised—you, a daughter of mine, and to interfere with the Shah's commands! For the love of Khoda, return to your anderoon and to woman's doings, and leave me to the execution of my master's orders; there is danger in delay."

"Is it thus that you know your own daughter?" answered the intrepid maiden; "I am not that Zulma known to all the world, if you think to frighten me with speeches such as these. I have helped to punish the guilty, but never the innocent. That man (pointing to Zohrab), whom but for me you would have killed, is not to be treated like a Jew or an Armenian; he ought to be the pride of our country, and not spurned at like one of its dogs. Shame on ye all;—on the Shah first—on you, father, next—and on ye all," turning to the assembled ferashes, "for taking advantage of the weakness of one to assail him in a body!"

"What are we to do then?" said the humpback in his softest manner; "will the Begum rather put our lives in jeopardy, and save the youth for a few protracted hours; or make him, by her fascination, accede to the Shah's wishes, and thus doing away with the necessity for violence, make us all happy, beginning with the King first, and ending with himself?"

"Ah! would it were so," said the maiden in a subdued tone; "I ought to be the last to speak; at the same time throwing one of her softest glances at the scarcely conscious Zohrab, "Let the Khan himself speak," said she, "he sees how much depends upon him."

Zohrab, notwithstanding the horror and disgust which he felt at the whole of the Shah's proceedings against him, still could not but feel flattered at the interposition in his favour of one so beautiful as the chief executioner's daughter. He was dazzled by her beauty, awed by her audacity, and astonished at her quickness and intelligence. Willingly would he, however, have retreated from a scene in every way so disagreeable to him, but called upon, as he was, to say something on an occasion where he ought to feel grateful, and in which he really did feel thankful for having been saved the mortification of an ignominious punishment, he said with some hesitation—"What can I say?—benefits such as you have conferred upon me demand my utmost gratitude. My senses can scarcely believe their own testimony—I have been saved from ignominy by the hand of some kind angel. You have made me your slave for ever. I am your slave, O lady! do with the unfortunate Zohrah what seems fitting to you."

He would have continued to go stumbling forwards with unmeaning and commonplace phrases such as these, had he not been stopped by the intriguing barber, who had now, so he conceived, attained the object which he had in view; namely, to bring Zohrab and Zulma face to face, to make the latter confer such a benefit upon our hero which must draw forth his gratitude, and ultimately, he hoped, to give rise to a passion which would end in their desired union. He said to the youth, "In truth, Zohrab Khan, it is plain that you will now satisfy our wishes. We are all grateful to you—may your house prosper! Inshallah, please God, you will no longer receive trouble. Your business will shortly be put into proper train."

Every body present now wished to say something, but the humpback would in no manner allow them. The chief executioner was desirous to enquire why the king's commands should not be put into effect? Zohrab, afraid lest his commonplace speeches should be misapprehended, was anxious to explain their meaning. Zulma, anxious to protract her interview with the man of her heart, was unwilling to leave his presence; but the man of intrigue without delay did his utmost to break up the assembly. To the chief executioner he said, "Do you not see that the youth has agreed to the Shah's wishes? Wherefore

detrain us longer? Send him away." To his daughter he whispered, "Say no more at present; all will go well; you did your part admirably. Go, go to your apartment, and I will come to you soon." To Zohrab he said, "Pardon all the inconveniences to which you have been put. These are wretches who have no understanding; they are Turks.* Let me entreat you to go take your rest, and let us not incommod you more."

His efforts succeeded. Zohrab returned to his solitary lodgings; Zulma to her anderoon; and the Humpback remained to explain matters to the Nasakchi Bashi.

"You are a man of wonderful slow perception," said the Goozoo, after they were seated. "Did not you see the impression which the sight of your daughter made upon the young hot-head! Say that there is such a thing as a lord of understanding in the world after what you have seen to-day! How is a man, and such a man as Zohrab, to fall in love unless he sees the object? Then say whether he has not seen her under the most favourable point of view—as his deliverer from punishment—as one interested in his fate. Go, go; the marriage is settled; you will have the bravest man in Persia for your son-in-law; and believe me, before we have seen six moons pass over our heads, he will become the Shah's favourite."

The chief executioner was slow in comprehending all that he had just heard. He was quick at a straightforward blow, but tardy in unravelling a tortuous intrigue. He shook his head, and said, "Wonderful *shaitan* art thou, O man of wit! but with all thy understanding, tell me with what face am I to appear before the Shah—I who have not obeyed his commands! For the youth's mind is not changed; he gave no consent to the marriage. How then can I tell the Shah that I did not obey because the cause for punishment no longer existed?"

"Leave that to me," said the Humpback. "Have you ever heard of a physician giving rise to a disorder, without having the medicine at hand to cure it? We do not walk without shoes, when we have a flinty road to travel over. Go make your mind easy. The Shah is a fox, 'tis true, but I am the father of foxes; but one word in your ear. You must say that the youth did consent; in truth he said words to that extent. Did not

* This is an epithet of contempt in the mouth of a Persian.

he say to your daughter that he was her slave—that she might do with him what she pleased? What do you want more?"

The chief executioner opened his eyes at hearing these words, and said, in a tone of amazement, "Is it so?" Then shaking his head, he continued, "You are a wonderful *shattan!* All that I heard the youth say was mere *chum wa hum*, or palaver. To consent in truth and reality is one thing—to bandy fine words is another; however, if you can swear that he did consent, there is no harm in that. I will swear too; and then, if he still refuses, we can only come to the bastinado again after all."

"Now, in God's name! order your horse," said the Hump-back; "let us go straight to the Shah, and report to him what we have done. Recollect, we say that he did consent; that, after having seen the whole apparatus of punishment in readiness, fright took possession of his soul, and that he said, whatever the Shah pleases, so was he ready to do. But, open your eyes! not a word of Zulma's appearing. Order your *naib* to suppress that part of the business. But it does not signify. Let people say what they please, we have a wit of our own, and the Shah's ear is in our hand; so nothing can come of it to us but good."

Upon this they repaired to the palace, and were admitted to the Shah's presence, where we shall for the present leave them.

CHAPTER XIV.

Geese in a basket and gossips in a harem!

SAYING IN MAZANDERAN.

WHEN Zohrab was summoned to appear before the Nasakchi Bashi, his youthful servant Ali was in attendance upon him, and witnessed the whole transaction. Sensibly alive to his master's forlorn situation, and withal possessing the curiosity natural to his age, he was always on the watch, eagerly attentive to every thing which related to his well-being. Upon the present occa-

sion, as soon as he saw the chief executioner's lieutenant, a personage universally dreaded, and when he had ascertained what was the nature of his visit, fear at first took possession of his faculties and almost deprived him of the power of doing aught else than keeping a fixed and earnest attention to every thing that was passing before him. As soon as his master was led away, he followed the procession at a cautious distance, and having crept unobserved into the court, the intended scene of punishment, he took his station sufficiently near to hear and see. In the meanwhile, fifty schemes in favour of his master's release were revolving in his mind. First he determined to apply to one person, then to another, but all his results terminated in seeking the protection of the Lady Amima, for she, and she only, he felt conscious, would protect the cause of the innocent and oppressed. When he heard the proposal of marriage made to his master, with all its brilliant advantages and pleasures described, he sided with the maker of it: and his mind was soon at ease that all would go well, that his master must agree to so charming an arrangement, and that of course he would rather marry than undergo the horrid alternative of a bastinado—but when he heard his master's answer, so fully did he revere his words, that, catching his indignation, he would have flown at those who dared propose any thing so unbefitting. And then, as soon as he saw the immediate consequences, the attack commenced, the violence offered, and the fearful odds against his safety, he could wait no longer, but straightway took his departure before he could ascertain the result, and without looking back, he made at once for the gate of the royal harem, and enquired with the utmost precipitation for his mother, whom he knew was there in attendance. He was allowed to see her, and then, breathless and distressed, he related the danger to which his master was exposed, and demanded that it should immediately be made known to the Princess. As soon as Mariam had informed her mistress of Ali's application, and that he himself was in attendance, she ordered him to be brought before her, conducted by his mother; and although, according to the strict rules of the harem, boys of his age were prohibited entrance, still she did not hesitate, when there was a case of urgency demanding her interference, to place herself above them.

She was seated in the turret-chamber when Ali was an-

nounced, and not having seen Zohrab that morning on his terrace, she immediately suspected that something untoward had taken place.

"What has happened, Ali?" said Amima to him with a kind and encouraging accent; "what news have you?"

The boy, in an animated manner, his eyes suffused with tears and his voice tremulous from agitation, said, "I am come to seek your protection for my master; they have seized him; they may have put him to death by this time. In the name of Allah, as you are a Mussulman, send some one instantly to stop their blows. It is at the house of the chief executioner that the wretches are striking him."

Seeing at one glance that no time was to be lost, and suppressing for a moment all curiosity as to the cause of the violence, she immediately drew from under her cushion her kalemdoun and her roll of paper, and wrote a short note to this effect to the Shah :

"My king! my uncle!

"As you love Allah, and as you would receive that mercy which you show to others, spare the unfortunate Zohrab Khan. We hear that at this moment he is undergoing the torture of punishment. Let the prayers of your niece be heard in his behalf!"

Having rolled it up and sealed it with her seal, she instantly dispatched Mariam to her brother, who she knew would put it into the king's own hands; and when that was done, she turned towards Ali, and then requested him to give her an account of what had taken place.

The Princess sat in earnest attention, her arms resting on her knees, bending over her seat; the anxious mother was placed in front, whilst the boy, totally unmindful before whom he stood, drew two or three steps nearer than was the proper etiquette, and began at once as follows:

"My master was seated in his place; I was standing before him, when the deputy of the chief executioner, with the perfection of disrespect, pushed aside the curtain, walked in, and said aloud, 'Bismillah, in the name of Allah, arise and follow me.' My master said nothing; it was evident that his heart was full of blood; he got up; we left the room. My heart had turned upon itself. I could have drunk the deputy's blood. I followed

at a short distance. When we entered the courtyard of the Nasakchi Bashi, there we saw him seated ; his ferashes were standing round, the *felek* was there ; my master proceeded, and stood before them like a lion. The Nasakchi Bashi said to him many things—this and that, and so and so,—that the Shah had ordered him to marry the Lady Zulma, and if he did not, he would eat more blows than there were leaves on the trees. By your soul, you ought to have seen my master, and to have heard his words. His eyes became as large as the palm of my hand, and flashed like sparks from a flint. He tore the executioners with his words. ‘What news is this,’ said he, ‘ye cowards? I won’t marry your daughter—tear me to pieces—do what you like—I will not marry her. I am no one’s slave,’ said he; ‘my king is my father,’ said he. Many many more things said he, until they all stroked their beards, and cried ‘*Allah, Allah il Allah!* there is but one Allah!’ After this the Nasakchi Bashi and the king’s humpback, who had each put their finger in their mouths and said ‘Allah, Allah!’ became ashamed of themselves, and in their turn began to give my master his full share of abuse; they called the ferashes to seize him, two sprang forward, he threw them before him as if they had been water melons. Rustam never performed such a feat. In truth, my heart was in my mouth ; such a lion I never even dreamt of; all were in amazement; all feared to approach him. At length the Nasakchi Bashi and the humpback, roaring out together, ‘Seize, bind, and kill!’ all the ferashes rushed on him at once; I then thought I saw him overpowered; I could stand the sight no longer; my heart turned back upon me, and I fled to you for succour; what more shall I say?’ Here the boy’s feelings got the better of him, and his excited state melted away before a violent flood of tears which came to his relief.

Amima in the meanwhile became also visibly affected ; she had caught the whole of the boy’s agitation, and her mind became almost as powerfully excited as his. She would have flown to the aid of the unprotected youth, and interposed her own person to the violence about to be offered to him, had she been able. The interest which he had before excited in her breast became double. She had a secret conviction that the steadiness of his refusal to marry the chief executioner’s daughter, might in some manner be swayed by his feelings for her.

She became perplexed what to do; to interest herself too strongly in his favour might excite suspicions hurtful to both, not to step in for his protection when he was left thus totally at the mercy of heartless cruel men would be base. All she could do in the present state of the case, was to await patiently the answer which she hoped to receive from the Shah to her note. She continued to ask more questions from Ali, the subject being one about which she could never tire, until Mariam returned to her, with the assurance that ere long she would receive some communication from the Shah. In fact, very soon after, the eunuch in attendance came to say that the humpback was arrived on the part of the king, and waited to be admitted.

The Princess had no sooner granted his admittance than he appeared. Obsequiousness to those in authority was one of his leading characteristics, and considering the influence which the Lady Amima had over the Shah, it may be supposed that the respect which he paid to her almost amounted to adoration. He was aware how much she despised him, and in his heart he could have destroyed her, her confidant Mariam, and Mariam's brother Sadek, with pleasure, but he was obliged to repress his true feelings, and to act as if he were not worthy to hold their shoes.

As soon as he entered, the Princess pointed to a distant place on the *nimmud* for him to sit upon, which he did after numerous contortions of the body, huddling of clothes over his feet, and other signs of humility, as practised by an inferior before a superior.

"What may be the commands of the Shah to his servant?" said Amima.

Making up his hideous features into his best smile, then touching the ground with his hand, bringing it up to his mouth to kiss, whilst bowing low, he said, "As I am your slave, as I kiss your threshold, the asylum of the universe has ordered me to represent to my Lady Banou that her note has been understood, and that the Shah says 'Upon my eyes be it! Even as you wish, so it is.'"

"How?" said Amima, with great animation of look and manner.

"Whatever you have commanded, so it is; Zohrab Khan has not been molested, his heart's wishes are put in order."

"Explain your meaning," said the overjoyed Princess. "My object was to protect the oppressed. We heard that punishment was about to be inflicted upon an unexperienced youth, and our heart was afraid that the Shah had been wrongly advised."

"Our Banou has the soul of an angel," said the humpback; "the Shah's subjects are her slaves; wherever there be tears and groans, there she is ever at hand to relieve them. Heaven—the highest and choicest heaven—must be her destiny hereafter. The Christians may talk of their blessed Marianne, upon whom be blessings, but what is she to our Banou? 'Tis true, the Shah in his wisdom punishes the disobedient, as in right he ought, but when supplication comes before him, in the shape of such beauty and loveliness as our Lady of Irân,—his blessed niece—then, the strong gates of justice give way, and soft compassion walks in."

"But say," said Amima, "was my interference in the hostage's favour sufficiently in time to prevent the violence which was about overwhelming him?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said the humpback, "there was no need of violence! Wisdom had entered into his soul before we came to extremities; at the sight of danger his heart lost its valour; a look over the precipice made him retreat to the safe footing of prudence."

At these words, the boy Ali's features were agitated, and he would have spoken in defence of what he had before asserted, had not a look from the Princess awed him into silence.

"Then what has been the result?" said Amima, with a half faltering, half determined accent.

"The result is," said the man of intrigue, "that Zohrab Khan has agreed to receive the maiden Zulma from the Shah as his wife, and that he will henceforward be numbered among the most favoured servants of Persia, as he already is its most distinguished ornament."

Upon saying these words, the scrutinizing humpback fixed his eyes upon the expressive face of the Princess, which by the various feelings it exhibited after what she had just heard, showed that a deeper interest than compassion was involved in her interference in favour of Zohrab. She could scarcely rally her spirits, and a long pause ensued ere a word was said. Then, suddenly recollecting who it was seated before her, she said, with as much indifference as she could throw into her manner,

"I am grateful to the Shah for this intelligence. Thanks to Allah, that there have been no blows. It is for the glory of the Shah, that he should as seldom as possible have recourse to violence. You are dismissed," said she to the humpback, "lay our respects at the foot of the throne."

At this, the intriguing barber made his most obsequious though most hypocritical obeisance, and took his leave; the boy Ali and his mother at the same time were dismissed, and the disconsolate, dejected Amima remained alone. She took herself to task for allowing her mind to be so much affected at what she had just heard; the more she endeavoured to persuade herself to be indifferent to the future destinies of Zohrab, and to his marriage with Zulma, the more sadness and grief seemed to take possession of her. She found that she had acquired a habit of associating every emotion of her heart, and every scheme for her future life, with Zohrab. This she felt must now be destroyed; she looked upon her passage through life, as a walk through a wilderness, or as an excursion through a cloud, without interest, without any thing to mark her way; as a toil uncheered by variety, unsupported by any of the best affections of the heart.

Mariam, who watched her mistress with almost the tenderness and assiduity of an elder sister, had for some time observed the abstracted state of her mind, and how totally it was absorbed by one thought. Still Amima took an interest in all that was going on, for hope formed the basis of her thoughts, and she imagined that some happy event might bring about that which her heart so much desired. But after the intelligence she had just received, a numbness appeared to have spread itself over her faculties, and she was dead to every kind of interest. The humpback and the chief executioner gave themselves infinite pains to have it reported throughout the city, that the celebrated hostage, who was destined to enjoy the future favour of the Shah, was to be united to the beautiful Zulma, and as the news was in every body's mouth, so it did not cease to be repeated and believed by every woman in the royal harem, and consequently became the subject which was sure to be the most canvassed and repeated in the presence of the unhappy Amima. Mariam was the only one among her women who never spoke of it to her mistress. She had that nicely of tact, peculiar to

women, only to be learnt in courts, of avoiding without appearing to do so the one subject to be avoided. But whenever some of the less refined attendants of the harem appeared before their mistress, and which, according to certain daily etiquettes, they were obliged to do, then indeed she underwent torture.

"As I am your sacrifice," said the lady *Arzbeggi*, the lady of requests, upon seeing the Princess as soon as the marriage was publicly announced, "the fortunes of that father of *shaitan*, the needy Mazanderani, must be well on the rise, to carry off such a wife from under the noses of so many of the great men about court, who were all pulling each other's beards to get her."

"Our Princess knows," said the female tent-pitcher in chief, "that if he be the father of *shaitans* she is the mother;—wonderful things are said of her. She herself superintends a bastinado—*ajeb zering est*;—she is activity itself!"

"It is said of her," added another, "that she has the intelligence of a vizir; that she directs the whole of her father's house, and even superintends the stables."

"She knows the age of a camel," said the lady moonshee, "better than a camel-driver, and will tell the *mirakhor* when and where he ought to bleed a sick horse better than the farrier."

"A rare wife she will be at that rate," said the deputy moonshee, "for a lord of the sword, as her husband is reputed to be."

"Long live the Shah, and God give long life to the bride and bridegroom!" exclaimed old Leila, turning up her eyes, "provided we possess our Princess—what is every thing else to us, provided she be happy!"

"Amen!" said all the women in chorus, headed by Mariam; "amen!"

This exclamation roused the lovely Amima from a fit of absence in which she had indulged during the gossip which she had allowed her women to carry on, and made her reflect how little inclined she was to add her amen to those which she had just heard. "Ah," thought she, suppressing a deep sigh, "what wish can I have to live? indeed what other wish ought I to have, but that it might please God to take me from this world now that I have nothing in it worth living for."

But she was destined to undergo a still stronger trial of for-

bearance. Seated as she was, with her court around her, two strange women were seen walking up the avenue leading to her dewan khaneh, headed by one of the ladies of the ceremonies, making their prostrations according to the prescribed etiquette. The lady of the ceremonies then, depositing her staff of office on the ground as she made her bow, said aloud—"We represent to our Lady Banou that the wife of the Nasakchi Bashi of the king of kings, with her daughter, Zulma Begum, request to be allowed to approach and to kiss the threshold of your royal presence."

This was an unexpected visit; for although it was frequent for the wives of the noblemen and principal officers of the court to pay their respects at the noon-day selam to the Banou of the harem, in the same manner as performed before the Shah, at this particular moment it became a trial of equanimity for the forlorn Amima, almost too great for her to bear. She had never seen the far-famed Zulma, and so far she excited her utmost curiosity, for where was ever a woman who was not curious to scan the beauty of a rival? but to talk to her, to congratulate her in honour of the Shah's commands, as she knew she must on her approaching marriage, was a task to which she felt herself unequal, without committing herself in the attempt.

Upon hearing the announcing speech of the lady of ceremonies, and seeing their humble prostrations, Amima was obliged to say "*Khosh Amedeed*, you are welcome," with the best voice she could, and after having taken a scrutinizing glance at the face and person of her rival, she proceeded through the usual string of phrases by way of composing herself into a state of indifference. "You are welcome," said she; "you have done us honour. You have no illness, I hope? Is your brain in right order? Are your spirits wound up?"

To all these words they answered the prescribed—"May your shadow never be less;—from the benefits of your condescension we are quite well;—owing to your friendship, our brains are entire;—owing to your compassion, our spirits are quite in order."

A long pause took place after this, when the lady of the ceremonies thought it right to explain the object of the visit. "The Khanum," said she, pointing to the chief executioner's wife, "by order of the king of kings, is come to kiss our Prin-

cess's feet, to show her the gratitude of her soul for all the interest she has taken in the fate of the less than the least—her daughter, who, Mashallah, praise be to God! is to marry the noble hostage, Zohrab Khan."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the chief executioner's wife, who, luckily for Amima, was one of those prating, verbose women, who would chatter for an hour without leaving one intelligible impression of what she would say upon her hearer. "Yes, yes, we are your servants; we are your slaves. The Shah is full of condescension towards us, and towards my Khan. May the holy prophet take him into his holy keeping. Praise be to Allah, all that we want we have from the king's bounty! If we have salt 'tis his; if a home, if clothing, if a bit of bread, if life, if breath, 'tis his—all that we have is his. See this child (pointing to her daughter) I am the mother who bore her; I, from a little thing, have brought her up; she is nothing of herself, but from the condescension of the Shah and the Princess, praise be to God! she will be something. She has a personable appearance, 'tis true, that she has. I say nothing—I am her mother; if she has beauty, 'tis owing to the shadow thrown over us by the Princess; if she can talk, if she is accomplished, who gave it her but the compassion and approving nod of the asylum of the universe? We are come to seize the hem of your garment—to kiss your knee—to ask your protection. We are people of nothing:—we are servants of the king. Excepting the king and the princess, what is there but dust in the world?—we are some of that dust. The king ordered us to come; the Khan, that less than the least, my husband, the chief executioner, your highness's servant, told me—'Go, take your daughter—go, worship our princess—go, kiss the threshold which leads to her presence.' We are come—we want nothing but your condescension."

To all this Amima occasionally let fall a faint "*Khoob, well—belli, yes!*" whilst the haughty Zulma, by a certain impertinent turn of her head, would fain show how much she wished her mother to stop the flow of her vapid compliments, in order that she herself might say something; but the more she attempted to open her lips, so much more did her mother shout on, filling the court with the reverberating sounds of her chatter.

When, after a little pause, Amima said the words—"We

are grateful," they only acted as a theme for the babbler to go off again.

"Grateful!—our princess says she is grateful! Grateful! what may be the meaning of that in such lips, and for what—because two of her slaves came to do their bounden duty? Let her tell us to become martyrs for her—to spill our blood for her—to cut our tongues for her—(here Zulma was seen to smile, whilst several other women did the same)—and then indeed we may call ourselves grateful for being thought worthy of such a privilege—but our princess, that she should be grateful! *astafferallah*, heaven forbid!"

Zulma began now to be very impatient, and seeing that there was no chance of saying a word if her mother was not stopped, gave a hint to that effect to the lady of the ceremonies, who, accustomed to the indiscretions of untimely speech, said to her—"The Princess commands silence;" upon which the good lady became silent, although, like wind oozing from a cracked though inflated bladder, sounds indicating coming words, would seem constantly to be craving for exit from her mouth.

Zulma then said, with the proper expressions of respect, though with a certain arrogance of manner which was peculiar to her, that the Shah had graciously commanded that a public wedding should take place to celebrate her marriage with Zohrab Khan, and had ordered that this should be represented to the lady Amima, in order that she might direct and superintend the whole ceremonial—the dresses, the presents, and the entertainments.

The oppressed Amima, who had hoped that after this interview was over she might be left to herself, and never more be applied to on the subject, heard with dismay the prominent part which it was intended that she should take. She shrunk from the undertaking; the very apprehension of the nauseous rejoicings of which it was intended that she should be the promoter, sickened her to the heart, and she looked upon any misfortune, however great, as preferable. But what could she say? Already she showed sufficiently, by the agitation and embarrassment of her manner, how much more interested she was than she ought to be upon a subject of an indifferent nature, and to refuse an office so evidently complimentary would excite suspicions in the breast of the Shah, and indeed in that of every

other person, which would be in the highest degree dangerous. She therefore gave her assent in the best manner she was able to Zulma's request, and in addition to the words which implied her assent, she added, "*Inshallah, mubarek bashed* ;—and, please Allah, may the marriage be fortunate."

Upon this, the garrulous mother again broke forth, "Certainly, most certainly it will be fortunate, if our princess wishes it. She has only to stretch out her hand, and certainly happiness will step forth, with its head up, and its cap on one side!"

The prater would have gone on for ever, had not Mariam stepped in to her mistress's help. She had perceived in how painful a situation she was placed, and how much her mind had been harassed by the unexpected visit from Zulma and her mother, and particularly by the import of the message of which they were the bearers. She therefore soon contrived to stop all further speeches from the mother, and assuming a tone of authority which was foreign to the gentleness of Amima's nature, she at once broke up the assembly, and said aloud, "Our lady has ordered that you should be dismissed. You are dismissed;" and immediately the necessary prostrations were made by all present, and every one departed, not, however, without a look full of scorn from Zulma to Mariam, which seemed to ask, who had armed her with that tone of authority?

When Amima was at length left to herself, she called to her attendant, and said, "I am indeed grateful to you for having broken up the *selam*. I am quite dead with that old person's flattery. Can nothing be done to stop such odious forms of speech?—and this wedding too! Ah! ah!" added she, sighing deeply, "who would have thought that our ill-fated adventure in the Sawachi pass would have entailed such misery upon us! It was a bad hour when we bent our steps thither!"

"In truth it was," said Mariam; "but *Allah kereem*, God is merciful! who can withstand destiny?"

"One thing I have resolved," said Amima, with a sort of false resolution on her lips, "which is, that I never will go into that turret again. By the aid of the Prophet, that is at an end. Order it to be closed, my soul Mariam! let the world go on as it likes, I will none of it."

Mariam did not feel it right to resist this order, for she easily

perceived what was the state of her mistress's feelings. It was too plain what an effect the certainty which now existed in her mind of Zohrab's marriage, had already produced even upon her appearance. There was a flush upon her cheek, a tremor in her frame, and a wildness in her eye, which indicated the most violent inward emotion repressed by apparent calm. Her faithful attendant would have spoken, and would have entreated her, as she valued her life, to give full vent to her feelings, but she feared to show her how much she had committed herself, and was willing to leave her mind to the effect of quiet and the absence of excitement. Accordingly, she respectfully withdrew. When the sensitive maiden was left entirely alone, she then gave vent to her feelings, and a copious flood of tears came to her relief. Prayer to God, which gives relief to the Mahomedan as well as to the Christian (for God, the true God, is still at the bottom of every heart), gave a softened turn to the blasting disappointment with which she had been assailed, and she most fervently consoled herself by mental devotion, and by an entire resignation to the decrees of divine Providence. So far, indeed; the injunctions of her Prophet came greatly to her aid, for who that has ever witnessed the extraordinary composure of a Mahomedan in adversity, equal to that produced by the firmest stoicism of antiquity, must not feel aware of the peculiar support which his belief in predestination affords him in the hour of trial. Amina now turned over in her mind all that had taken place during that morning, as calmly as she could. It was difficult for her to make the idea which she had formed of Zohrab's character accord with his present conduct. She dwelt upon their first meeting, and the subsequent consistency of his spirited behaviour. She then blamed herself upon having put too endearing a signification to those night watchings on the terrace, which she had flattered herself were the effects of a mutual attachment; but to unite himself to such a woman as Zulma, was more than she thought one so superior could ever have resolved to do! From this time forwards her character seemed to be changed: grief took possession of her heart, and preyed upon her tender frame, and the frequent call she had to oppose those feelings only served to increase the evils which assailed her.

CHAPTER XV.

Good news, though from a fool's mouth, is still good news.

PERSIAN PROVERB.

WHEN Zohrab returned to his confinement, after the indignities which he had received at the hands of the Nasakchi Bashi, his irritation and excitement may be more easily conceived than described. He had been treated like a common malefactor for no crime, and had been saved from the actual punishment at the sacrifice of receiving a benefit from one with whom he wished to have no dealings, and being forced, as it were, into acknowledgments which might be brought up against him to his prejudice. And he was the more averse to the advances which had been made, because they came at a moment of all others the most likely to be resisted, namely, when he had wound himself up to the highest point of love and adoration for the resistless though prohibited Amima. In the comparison which he constantly made in his mind, of her excellence, with the character of those by whom she was surrounded, she rose so superior in his estimation that he scarcely thought himself worthy of the blessing he enjoyed of looking even from a distance at the building which contained her; and the adoration which he mentally paid to the turret, might be in some measure compared to that which the Christians of Georgia pay to those churches and sanctuaries which are built on the highest pinnacles of their mountains, and to which they kneel when they perceive them, even at the greatest distance.

He had scarcely seated himself, ere he was visited by one whom he had never before seen, and whose person exhibited a great ostentation of dress. He was heard at a distance by the rustling of his silken vest; nothing was equal to the gloss and the adjustment of his cap, or to the bewitching tie of his shawl. The tip of every finger was enamelled with a red dye. Every

hair in his beard was curled and set with mathematical precision; and when he spoke, his lips, fringed with the perfection of a mustache, opened ever and anon a battery of brilliant teeth, which launched with double force (at least in his own conceit) every word that passed through them upon the admiring hearer. This personage was followed by an effeminate looking servant, who might have passed for a woman, dressed almost as gaily as himself, who occasionally presented to him a beautiful gold and crystal kalioun, which he smoked with astonishing dexterity and affectation, taking only a lengthened whiff, which by a small action of his head he managed to throw over his beard, as also to perfume his person.

Zohrab received him with civil speeches, and invited him to sit, which he did without much pressing, taking an inferior place, and one which Zohrab thought did not accord with the pretensions of his appearance.

"I am come," said the stranger, "to present myself to your service, and ask after the state of your well-being."

"I am grateful," answered Zohrab; "is there any thing I can do to serve you?"

"I am your servant," said the other, "I am the servant of your family. You do not know me, but Mashallah! praises to Allah, it is a long while since I have known you. The air of Irân is filled with your renown; I am come from Mazanderan, and there, by the beard of the Shah I swear, you are worshipped."

"You come from Mazanderan?" said Zohrab; "from what part of it, in the name of Ali?"

"Yes," said the visiter, with a consequential tone, "I have done service for you. I have seen those who love you, those who pray for you, those who cry day and night for you, who eternally are repeating, 'His place has long been vacant.'"

"Is it so, indeed?" said his hearer, with some interest in his manner.

"By your head it is so," answered the other, "I am just come from Asterabad; I am Shir Khan Beg."

The vain Persian expected at these words that Zohrab would start with surprise, presuming that such a person must be known to all the world; but the hostage, just recollecting that his name had been mentioned in the letter which he had received from

his father, then said, " You are welcome, we have thanks to give you ; you saw my parents and brought me a letter lately ; may your home prosper ! "

Shir Khan Beg was delighted to receive any compliments, however small, although he always expected a full return for those which he was constantly making ; and then finding that he had made good his acquaintance with the object of his visit, he curled up his mustache, smoothed down his beard, and cast a look of self-complacence over his person !

" You saw my father, then," said Zohrab, with the greatest interest beaming in his looks ; " how was he ? did he appear in spirits ? And my uncle too, did you see him ? "

" Praise be to Allah," said Shir Khan, " there is none like unto your Aga in the world ; active, open-eyed, a full done man ; the master of deep thought. He showed me marvellous friendship ; he treated me as his son. Your uncle too, he was wonderfully pleased with me. He said things, O many things to me. I also am not without wit ; I also said many things to them. There is not a person now in Asterabad who does not know Shir Khan Beg—I—I—I—"

The self-sufficient Beg would have gone on in this strain, had not Zohrab mildly reminded him that he required some information concerning his parent's well-being, and not comments upon his own merits. " I wanted to know whether my father and uncle are in good health," said he.

" Their health was excellent," said Shir Khan, " and I also was in fine spirits. They sent me a supper, consisting of trays heaped up with such good things ! such fruit ! O prophet ! where are the apples of Mazanderan and the fish too, the *shah mahi* from the *Culzum*, the Caspian ? "

" But how did you manage to get into the fort ?" said Zohrab, gently stopping his digression. " Those Turcomans are in general very lynxes at watching the approach of strangers, and I know they never will hold converse with any one except he keep without the wall."

" You do not know Shir Khan," exclaimed the Persian, stroking his beard, and pressing down his girdle over his hips. " I am not without my bit of courage ; whatever they said, whatever prohibitions they made, whatever guns they pointed

at me, whatever was done, nothing prevented my approach. I threw myself forwards on my horse—*hi!* I galloped—*hi!* I roared—in truth, on that day I was a lion—until at length I reached the city gate. I saw a cow's beard looking over the turret wall, and a Turcoman attached to it—let an Irâni alone—he asked me what I wanted? By your head! by the soul of your father! by the salt of Aga Mohamed Shah!—I so laughed at his beard that before a minute was over, he was walking round and round my little finger; and before another minute was over, the gates were opened to me, and ‘Bismillah’ was said to me by a thousand voices.”

Zohrab, who was anxious to ascertain, directly or indirectly, what might be his father's real intentions concerning his future conduct towards the Shah, allowed the Beg to have his full talk, and only stopped him when he swerved too far from the path of his narrative. He then said to him, “ You did great things, indeed, but did you at once enter into the heart of the city? The people of Asterabad seldom do business in that way.”

“ No!” said Shir Khan, “ at your service be it: they kept me at the gate, and there, even there, we had our *gûftigû*, or negotiation. I, on the part of the Shah, my master; your honoured father, your honoured uncle, and two or three heavy Turcoman white beards, or elders, on the part of the rebels. I said such things! on the part of the king of kings, I said, ‘ I am come in order that you may know that at length your rebellion must cease. The marrow of your rebellion has been scooped out by the hand of fortune, and placed into the blessed mouth of the asylum of the universe. Zohrab is in his possession?’ by your soul I said so. ‘ The lion is chained, and is piquetted before the exalted gate. Sheath your swords—uncover your heads—stretch out your necks—kiss the earth—come before the king—seize his skirt, and cry *aman*, for nothing more is left for you. Eat no mere abomination. Cease your short-sighted endeavours to be free. I, who am your friend, I say so!’ upon which I produced the Shah's firman, and at my words all the wind immediately fled from their heads, they became less than the least, and they sat with their fingers in their mouths. By your soul, I do not lie. I, who am Shir

Khan, I say the truth. Go and ask your father; ask of your own father and uncle, and they will tell you that I am not a man to disguise the truth."

"Well!" said Zohrab, greatly amused with the vapourings of his visiter, "what did they say in answer? Did not they say things?"

"What had they to say?" replied Shir Khan Beg with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders. "They looked at each other—they looked at me. My words, which in truth were like arrows, remained without an answer, and all they said showed them to be in a state of suspense, and with their heads going round and round. At length they said '*Be cheshm*, by our eyes,' and it was agreed that they should proceed to the foot of the throne. By your soul, it is so!"

"Is it so, indeed?" said Zohrab. "Are you sure that my father is on his road hither!"

"I will take my oath upon the Koran," answered Shir Khan, "that he is; but there is no need for that, since I say it—of what use is an oath, when a word is enough?"

"When is he likely to be here?" inquired the hostage.

"Now, even now!" said the other; "his *peish-khaneh*, his preparatory servants, they say, are already arrived."

This information excited Zohrab's attention to an intense degree. He had scarcely allowed himself to indulge in the hope that he should actually see his father; and had laid no plan hitherto as connected with that event; but now he felt it urgent that he should immediately determine what would be his best line of conduct; and at one glance he saw that it was now as much his duty to bend to circumstances, and to conciliate, in order to prepare for his father as friendly a reception as possible, as before he had thought it right to act independently of all considerations, save his own honour and well-being.

"Do you know," said Zohrab to his visiter, "of whom the embassy consists?"

"It is said," answered Shir Khan, "that your honoured father is the chief, accompanied by your uncle Mustafa, and the two Turcoman white beards. I know thus much—I—I—"

"Where are they to be lodged?" said Zohrab.

"Some say that their suite, which is large, is to be quartered at the village of hostages, in the neighbourhood, whilst the

chiefs will take up their abode with the Grand Vizir, and be his guests. Others say that the Shah has ordered the chief of the camel artillery, the Zamburekchi Bashi, to clear out his house and premises for them, and to lodge them there all together;” and here, lowering his voice to a tone of humility, and throwing a softened expression into his features, like one about to ask a favour, whilst he drew himself together into as small a compass as possible, he said, “ And in truth, O Khan! it was upon that subject that I ventured to come before you, for I have a supplication to make. It is now plain to all the world, that whatever has happened, has happened and is gone by, but that for the future you, Mashallah! are to be the elect of fortune. The Shah has vowed that you are to be the greatest man who sits in his gate; see, he gives to you in marriage the choicest maiden of Irân; that flower, of which others have not dared even to catch a distant scent, has been at once plucked and thrown into your bosom. The sword of the Rustams and the Afrasiabs is to be placed in your hands, and you are to be the champion of our country. In short, it is plain, that your word is to be law, and your wishes are to be commands. Now, my humble supplication is this—as for me, now you know me, I do not wish to praise myself, but this I will say, that in truth among the youth who ply at the Shah’s stirrup, I am not one of the least. Thanks be to God! I am not without thought. I am neither without words. I have a tongue, which all acknowledge has not its equal. I am master of *chum wa hum* in all its branches. I am not one of those Turks who sit upright on my heels waiting for words. My wit presses on like my courage in a field of battle. It is always impelling me on. The Shah himself agrees to this. Do not believe me to be such an ass as not to be able to transact the Shah’s business.”

“ Astaferallah, God forbid!” exclaimed Zohrab, who, lost in his own thoughts, had allowed his garrulous visiter to proceed uncontrolled, but who now, wishing to bring him to the point of his application, said, “ but you wished to ask something of me. What is it?”

“ It is this,” said Shir Khan; “ since, by the blessing of Allah, your honoured father is speedily to arrive; since I have already been to Asterabad, and am acquainted with the negotiation hitherto carried on with the rebels there; and since your wishes

are to be now attended to—my desire would be to be appointed Mehandar to the embassy. Wallah, billah!" exclaimed he, "I have no wish but to be of use to you, and to return to your father here all the friendship he showed me at Asterabad."

Zohrab could not refrain from smiling at this request; he immediately stated how very unlikely it was that he who had but just escaped from every indignity and ill-treatment at the hands of the Shah, should all at once be elevated to the power and authority which was contemplated by the Beg, and that, prisoner as he was, he felt that he himself was dependant upon the kindness and indulgence of others, instead of being a patron and a protector. "However," said Zohrab, "I see no impossibility in your request. If the Shah wishes to receive the embassy in a friendly manner, I dare say he will appoint such a person to be its Mehandar as will be agreeable to the ambassador; and as you appear, according to your own account, to be admirably fitted for it, if I should happen to be consulted, believe me I will not be wanting in forwarding your wishes."

Upon this Shir Khan Beg, who already looked upon himself as marshalling and controlling the whole of the Asterabad delegation and its affairs, took his leave several inches taller than when he came.

Zohrab scarcely gave himself time to cast a thought upon the strange character who had just left him, so much engrossed was he by the position which his own affairs had taken. He felt certain now that the false rumour of his having acceded to the Shah's wishes to marry Zulma, must have been spread all over the city, and consequently have reached the ears of Amima. What would he not have given to be able to explain to her in person the situation in which he was placed, to pour out to her the ardour of his love, and to avow his unalterable firm resolution never to swerve from his affection! He abhorred the character of a dissembler; but still, possessing the knowledge of his father's early arrival, and aware that the success of his schemes might in great measure depend upon his own conduct at the present moment, he felt that he ought not to appear to set at defiance the Shah's wishes and commands, but wait patiently for an opportunity of consulting by word of mouth with his relations upon the line of conduct which he ought to pursue. Nothing, he was resolved, should ever make him marry Zulma;

and although his hopes of ever possessing Amima might be totally desperate, still so resolutely did he cling to the soothing thought of living for her alone, that in the ardour of his youthful mind he persuaded himself that that alone ought to satisfy him.

He was in the midst of these thoughts when Ali his servant returned to him from the presence of the Princess. The boy immediately gave a full and distinct account of all that had passed, which only served to heighten his master's perplexities; for how could he command sufficient patience and forbearance to appear to accede to the Shah's wishes, when the account which he had just received of his Amima's interference in his favour, drove all prudence from his mind, and inflamed him with a redoubled fit of devoted and unalterable love?

The noon-day prayers were announced from the minarets, when Zohrab was left to his own meditations after the various events of the morning. His mind was tossed to and fro with contending schemes and resolutions, and the certainty that he would shortly see or hear from his father, acted as a check upon the formation of any immediate resolution, and damped the natural impetuosity of his own character by the respect and reverence which he felt for his parent.

Still every thought and feeling turning towards Amima, and after he had exhausted his spirits within the walls of his room, he naturally ascended his terrace, wishing to refresh his eyesight as well as his imagination, by contemplating the spot in which she usually passed her time, and through the medium of which he fondly hoped much and frequent mental communication had taken place between them. But when he looked to the turret, to that well-known spot where he had so long and so frequently feasted his eyes with the form of his beloved, what was his dismay upon seeing it entirely closed, and apparently untenanted! The casements, which before were open to every wind, were shut, and instead of the daylight, which was allowed to pour in on every side, although mitigated by the fretwork of the lattice, nothing but a heavy closed front reared its head before the disappointed lover.

This circumstance gave a new turn to his thoughts. The certainty of Amima's displeasure immediately flashed across him, and oh! the pleasing, the long wished-for certainty of her not

being indifferent to him. "For," he argued, "there cannot be love without jealousy; it would not be love, and jealousy must exist in the most exalted minds as well as in the lowest: and if Amima, upon hearing the reports of my approaching marriage to Zulma has blessed my hopes that I am dear to her, by a fit of anger, what can it argue but her disapprobation of that marriage?" At the same time, he gave way to his own feelings, and was almost moved to tears, at the thought that he was perhaps afflicting her noble mind with misgivings as to the rectitude of his conduct. Again did he form schemes for seeing her. Willingly would he have braved every torment to be allowed to speak to her only for one short minute, and in vain he turned over every possibility, until he remained more than ever convinced, that nothing in the world is more impenetrable, or is held more sacred, than the harem of a Mohamedan.

Still ruminating upon the subject, he called to his faithful Ali to give him once more an account of his visit to the Princess.

"Where was she seated? now tell me, Ali," said his master, "how did she look? what did she say?"

"There, even there in the turret," said Ali; but when the boy cast his eyes upward and saw the chamber closed, he exclaimed, "Oh wonderful, 'tis closed! this is strange! for my mother told me that the Lady Banou would never sit in any other spot, nor in any other corner of the room but that which looks hitherwards."

"Perhaps she is sick; perhaps she has left us," said Zohrab.

"Oh sir," said the boy, "I, even I was there this morning, and she turned her head a great deal this way; she was in good health, and there was no sort of indication of changing her abode; on the contrary, I saw her praying carpet in the corner, ready spread for her devotions after the noonday salem; and why should she not have returned to it?"

"What did she do, Ali, when you told her of the attack made upon me at the Nasakchi Bashi's?"

"What shall I say?" answered the boy; "her face turned a thousand colours, but at length paleness predominated, when we thought she would have fainted. But no; she calmly wrote a note to the Shah, and not till then would she hear my story."

Zohrab devoured his servant's words with as much eagerness

as if they had been sent to him from the seventh heaven by the angel Gabriel.

"But tell me," said he, "what did she say when you related all that had befallen me? What did she say of the appearance of the chief executioner's daughter, and of her interference in my favour?"

"I beg to represent," said Ali, "that I left the scene of contention before Zulma begun, and therefore could say nothing to the Banou upon that subject; but I told her how stoutly you refused marrying her. I repeated all the abuse you bestowed upon the ferashes, and the manner in which you rebuked the chief executioner."

"You did, did you?" exclaimed Zohrab eagerly, delighted that his real sentiments should so recently have been conveyed to his beloved. "You did well; I am satisfied with you. But what could have closed the turret? cannot you find out for me, Ali? Go enquire of your mother; perhaps she may tell you; perhaps you will then discover if the Lady Banou be really sick or not."

Ali again left his master to his own thoughts and conjectures, watching the turret in the hopes that he might see some indication of an inhabitant; but in vain. Occasionally it crossed his mind that he was wrong in thus allowing his servant to share his feelings, but trusting to his inexperience, which would prevent him seeing any thing in his enquiries but what flowed naturally from his anxiety upon his own situation, he did not scruple in placing more confidence in him than on another occasion he might be inclined to do.

CHAPTER XVI.

Then came the devil in the shape of a woman.

TEMPTATION OF SAINT ANTHONY.

ZOHRAB had passed the day in feverish uncertainty upon his future prospects, and had retired to his apartment disappointed with watching the closed and disheartening turret. His head was resting on his knees, as he was endeavouring to compose his mind by mental prayer and vows of resignation to the decrees of Providence, when his door was slowly and cautiously opened by a mysterious looking figure, so covered over and muffled that he could not discover by the uncertain twilight whether it was man or woman. It stopped some time at the threshold as if apprehensive of approaching, and then, as if it had ascertained that there was no other person in the room, stepped forward in an uncertain manner. By this time Zohrab had been able to make out that it was not a man, and still, how a woman could have found her way hither, watched and guarded as his dwelling was, it appeared to him impossible. The figure was, however, covered over from head to foot with a woman's veil, although it seemed to be put on in a temporary manner, and her general air and gait bespoke her such.

He arose from his seat as she advanced, and in a courteous though guarded manner invited her to be seated, which without more ceremony she did, carefully wrapping herself round so effectually that nothing of her person was seen, save part of a small and beautiful hand, which was exposed for the purpose of clasping her veil over her breast.

At length breaking silence in a woman's voice, she said, "It is plain that Zohrab Khan must be astonished at the visit of a woman, such things are not done in Irân, we know; but sometimes, when necessity is urgent, women must take the place of men."

"I am grateful," said Zohrab, "for the visit of whoever may be kind enough to notice one so wretched."

"And why so wretched?" said she; "is it not in your own hands to be as happy and as prosperous as the first of those who sit at the king's gate? What words are these?"

"Happiness and good fortune are good or bad by comparison."

"Allow," said the lady in a rallying tone, "allow that there is no man in Tehran, excepting Zohrab Khan, who would thus be visited by a woman. Will he tell me whether he calls that happiness and good fortune?"

"That is still matter of comparison," said Zohrab; "let me know my visiter, and then I will decide; hitherto, certainly happiness predominates."

"Ah!" said she, "I see you are like all men, although you are said to be superior to them all. You will not be satisfied with happiness in a veiled form."

"I would willingly seek it in any form," said Zohrab with a sigh, "for I have long been a stranger to it, and am willing to receive it at your hands in any manner you may choose to administer it."

"The happiness I would administer," said the mysterious figure, "is not of a transient nature, but lasting. It is not the happiness of an hour, or a day; but of years—of a whole life; could Zohrab Khan be a customer for such happiness?"

"No happiness can be such," said the youth, "unless it be permanent; to secure that is the business of every body's life, although we all go our different ways towards obtaining it. If you can really procure it for me, such as I should wish it, can you ask me whether I will be your customer or not? In the name of the Prophet, speak on! describe its quality; and then, name your price."

"Hear me," said the unknown. "Once upon a time, in the city of Cabul lived a facetious mollah, who sat at a corner of the principal gate of the bazaar, and who sold prosperity by the miscal. His commodity consisted of small bits of paper, upon which were inscribed sentences and prayers from the Khoran, and which he sold at so much the miscal. It happened that an Indian merchant, returning to his own country from the pilgrimage at Badkou, stopped to rest at Cabul. Jaded and de-

pressed as he was, the cry of the mollah struck his ear. Prosperity at so easy a rate was not to be withheld, therefore he immediately became a purchaser; he was not satisfied with the smaller portions—he asked for the largest possible quantity. The mollah upon this produced a whole and entire Koran, an old book, which he put into the scales, and, having weighed it, asked a large price for it. The merchant at once delivered up his all, and purchased the book. When he returned to his own city, he exhibited his purchase as the sure secret for obtaining prosperity; but not understanding Arabic, it remained in the corner of his house, whilst he supposed by some unseen manner that it was at work for him. Some of his countrymen were inclined to laugh at, others to envy him. One night, when the merits of his purchase had been more than usually discussed, he took the book into his hands, and turned over the leaves from beginning to end, hoping to discover something to his advantage; and sure enough between two leaves, which had been stuck together, he found a few lines written in the nagri character, which he could read; and from them he learnt that long since the book had belonged to a Mahomedan merchant of Cashmere, and that, by way of memorandum, he had written that under a certain tree, near a certain place, he had buried ten bags of gold, each containing a thousand double tomauns. Forthwith he departed, went to Cashmere, and there, in truth, he found the treasure in the very spot pointed out in the book. You may guess, after this, the faith which he and his countrymen ever after put in the Koran. “Now, said she, “it is not necessary to a man of your understanding to point out the drift of my story. If you take me as the Indian did the Koran, ignorant of my contents, seeing only my outside, I will promise, as did the mollah, that the possession of me will lead to prosperity. After this, what further explanation do you require from me?”

Zohrab, who by this time had almost been fascinated out of his reason by the wit, manner and voice of his mysterious visitor (though he had made a good guess who she might be), and had almost surmounted the disgust which the impropriety of her visit would have given him as well as to every other Mahomedan, had he reflected upon it, was about to answer in an unguarded and impassioned manner, when the door of his

room was opened of a sudden, and Sadek, the Shah's confidential servant, walked in. The lady had been so absorbed in her narrative, and our hero so attentive to her words, that the intruder came upon them quite unawares. As soon as she recognized him she uttered a faint cry, and darted out of the room as if she had been pursued by an evil demon. Zohrab looked confused, and a faint gleam of displeasure passed over his features at having been so unceremoniously intruded upon. Sadek's severe countenance expressed amazement, and he seemed to inquire by his look what might be the meaning of this strange and hurried apparition.

"Mashallah!" said he, in a tone half playful, half ironical, "we did not know that Zohrab Khan's marriage was so near as this. Perhaps I may not be told that my place is empty."

Zohrab, more anxious at this moment to screen the woman (whoever she might be) from false imputations than himself, answered in a more serious tone—"Whoever that person may be," said he, "know that she is without evil—I have not even seen her face—she may be houri or a devil for aught I know."

"But since you are going to be married," said Sadek, "what harm is there? These things will happen in the strictest harems. After all, a man must communicate with his wife, and not receive her into his house as he would a horse into his stable, given as a present, without inquiring into its good or bad qualities."

"You may laugh at my beard as long as you like," returned Zohrab; "and very probably you would not receive my words against the testimony of your own eyes; but of this be assured, that I am not so soon to be married, and that whether I am or not, the person who has just left the room is as much a stranger to me as she may be to you."

"So be it," said Sadek, "I do not wish to pry into your secrets; and therefore, be she wife or be she maid, I can say no more than good luck attend you both. My principal business is not of her; 'tis of other things; it is to tell you that you may prepare yourself to hear of the arrival of your father at any hour. His equipages and baggage are arrived, and they are accompanied by a most extraordinary personage—a dervish, about whom I wish to ask you some questions, as he probably is well known to you."

"A dervish!" said Zohrab, in surprise, as if he were prepared to hear of odd things; "I never knew one in Mazanderan of any great reputation."

"He calls himself the Dervish Hezzarpicheh, and he is really a remarkable man. In person he is tall and powerful; full chested, with strong arms, and large hands. He has a beardless sallow face, with long mustaches; an aquiline nose, and the eyes of the hawk. In dress he is most like an inhabitant of Cashgar; with turbanned head, but wearing a leopard's skin thrown loosely over his back; a large halbert is in his hand, and a profusion of thickly knotted rope is tied in many folds round his waist. A long knife is conspicuous in his girdle, and in his hand he swings a horn suspended by three chains. He professes a total indifference to every thing. He cares not when he sleeps, where he sleeps, nor whether he sleeps. He is equally indifferent to food. He gives himself no trouble to seek it. Unless it be given to him by the charitable, he never gets any thing beyond dry bread, and he rejects coffee, tobacco, opium, and every luxury of that description, with disdain. The only thing which he seems to care about is his rope; and that, as he mutters strange sounds and sentences, he is always twisting and tying over his body. Contempt of the world and mankind is the burthen of his discourse. He preaches contentment and resignation. All men are equal in his eyes. He gives the first place to the beggar, and sits before the king. In putting forth his doctrine, he expresses himself with the greatest energy, oftentimes with considerable eloquence, and generally with much originality. With all this he is mindful of every thing around him, particularly of the relative position of things and places; asks questions upon subjects the most irrelevant; marks and notes the names and histories of every body; pretends to be acquainted with the stars, and gives recipes and talismans for the ills of the mind. If he is reviled and upbraided, he calls for death, and invites any one to put him out of the world. When he is questioned concerning the coming embassy, his answers are evasive and in parables. Where he has picked up his moral sayings and his scraps of poetry, nobody can divine. They do not exist in any known books, and if they be of his own invention, what sage is there of our day who can stand before him? Some of his sayings have been already reported to

the Shah, who is all astonishment and bewildered. A bystander, who was pitying his poverty, as he lay basking in the sun, said, ‘Poor dervish, why do you choose to be so destitute?’ He exclaimed,

‘ Why call me poor, when I have much to give ?
Shine but the sun, and ample shade I give ;
Shade of my own, and whom none else can give ?’

Another asked him, ‘But why this rope? None but a fool would burthen himself with such a thing.’ He immediately answered,

‘ Beware of him who laughs at law and rule ;
Such perhaps are you ; but call not me the fool.
Could but this rope restrain my soul from sin,
I’d tie my heart in thousand folds within.’

In short,” said Sadek, “he has produced a sensation in the city that never was known, even since the days of Saadi. Some say ‘tis Saadi returned to earth ; others that it must be one of the imans. Whence he really came, what he is here for, and whither he goes, nobody can say.”

“I never heard of such a person, by the soul of my father,” said Zohrab. “Does he come from Asterabad with the embassy, or is he in any way attached to it?”

“The servants say that they picked him up on the road, and that he issued forth from the mazes of the *Teng shemshir bür*, as they passed it at midnight. He himself will answer no questions as to his own movements, and generally speaks in this manner : ‘Whence comes the wind? where goes the wind? ’tis here, ’tis there ; now it refreshes my breast, now it smothers my breathing. The wandering dervish is its companion ; he walks—he goes ; for ever onward goes he, till he will reach his final *menzil*; and then God’s commiseration be upon him! Already are the lame, the blind, the halt, the leprous, surrounding him, looking upon him as one come from heaven, and some are even happy if they can touch the skirt of his robe. The Shah himself is anxious to see him, but he says, ‘I want not the Shah; the only benefit he can confer upon me is to dislodge my soul from this ugly tenement of mine. If he wants me, here he will find me. I am as ready to see kings as beggars.’”

"Wonderful!" said Zohrab. "This must be a holy man, if he be sincere. He is in truth a wise man; for what, in fact, have we to do in this world of misery, but to make ourselves to go out of it."

"Hold," said Sadek, "you have got into this despondent state from having been so long in confinement. Hasten to marry; do not let that mysterious unknown languish for you, and you will no longer admire this fanatic dervish, and will agree with me, that man is made to work out his salvation through the intricate paths of active life, and not through the mire of indolence and sloth."

"Perhaps so," said Zohrab; "but tell me, shall I be able to see my father when he arrives? You know I can decide upon nothing till that takes place; and although I would not wish the Shah to think that I am so unmindful of his good intentions towards me as totally to reject his proposals, yet I may tell you, whom I hope to call my friend, that nothing shall persuade me to take any step that is not approved of by my father. Therefore I depend upon you to procure the Shah's sanction for my seeing him, as soon as it may be thought expedient."

"Upon my eyes be it," said Sadek; "but do not expect too much. We are surrounded by enemies. I, in particular, am watched by those who would be too happy to bring on my disgrace, and drink my blood; but I promise that as far as depends upon me, I will do every thing to advance your interests and secure your happiness."

Sadek upon this took his departure, leaving our hero at leisure to reflect upon the occurrence which had just taken place. He could not be mistaken as to the mysterious woman; for what maiden in Tehran, saving the executioner's daughter, would ever have ventured to take such a step? Although at the time he had felt displeased at Sadek's unannounced visit, yet now that he could form a better judgment, he blest his stars that it had so taken place, for he could not hide from himself that he began to feel the power of her fascination. He fortified himself with resolutions never again to allow of her approaches; for had she, in addition to the power of her conversation, opened the whole artillery of her charms upon him, he dreaded to think of the frailty which might have betrayed him to act in direct opposition to his principles and his better reason; but now that his

father was near at hand, he hoped that his future fate would soon be decided, and that his odious confinement would be terminated to some purpose or other. As for the dervish, he thought that he might be acting a part in furtherance of his father's schemes; but again, he reflected that so many of these fanatics were to be seen throughout Persia, that his meeting with the embassy might have been purely fortuitous.

Zulma, who having lost all patience at the slow progress of her wishes, had made up her mind to perform one of those extraordinary and independent feats for which she was so famous, had, as already described, visited Zohrab, having previously ascertained from her place of observation on the terrace that he was then in his apartment, and being at the same time secure as she thought from all interruption. When she found herself foiled by Sadek's visit, she returned to her own home furious at her disappointment. She called down every misfortune on the intruder's head. Every sort of suspicion immediately arose in her mind as to the object of his visit; and with her natural impetuosity, she immediately settled that he was attempting to impede her marriage.

In these feelings she lost no time in sending for the hump-back, who hastened to attend her summons; for he too was anxious to consult with her upon more subjects than the one which exclusively engrossed her.

"Say," said she, as soon as she saw him appear, "where is that good luck for which Zulma has ever been so celebrated? You, who are the owner of acuteness,—you, who pretend to converse with constellations, and know when a planet looks benignly and when it looks otherwise—tell me why a dog should cross one's path when nothing but pleasantness ought to await us?"

"What has happened, O my Khanum," exclaimed the astonished barber at this salutation; "whose dog has dared to threaten you with pollution?"

Upon this the highly excited maiden related all that had befallen her in her visit to Zohrab. She then launched out against Sadek in the following strain:

"At the very moment when, with that wit for which you know me to be famous, I had turned the head of the youth, and that he was about giving up his very soul to me, that dog

without a saint, Sadek, came in. What could I do? I fled. See my ill fortune! Whether or not he discovered who I was, that signifies little to me; Zulma to that is indifferent—but tell me why should he visit Zohrab Khan? Every one knows his severe and morose disposition, which prevents him from making friends with any one—he could not have come to him at that hour for friendship alone—he has some object in view, at the bottom of which is that ill-begotten Mariam, the Princess's woman, his sister—she governs him entirely, and makes him do whatever she pleases—she can turn him round her little finger, notwithstanding his sour face. Now tell me, hump-back, in your wisdom, tell me, do not you think that my suspicions are well-founded, and that I have a host of enemies in that quarter?"

The Goozoo at these words looked at his animated friend through the corner of his eye in the most arch and significant manner, but said not a word.

"Speak, light of my eyes, speak," said Zulma; "by my soul, speak! Have you discovered any thing? By that look, I am sure you have."

The artful barber seemed to enjoy the maiden's anxiety, and only excited it the more by indulging her with one of his best satanic grins. At length he said,

"And so you think to have made a discovery? After this, say that the Goozoo is not a man who sleeps without keeping one corner of his understanding always on the watch, and one corner of his eye always on the look out! It is some time since it has occurred to him that your suspicions are not without foundation. *Bah! bah! bah!*" said he, chuckling as he made his exclamations, "see what the penetration of one head will do. Let me tell you, that it is not Sadek of whom you need be apprehensive, nor of Mariam—what are they? they are mere dirt—but your rival is—shall I say it—it is—"

The over-excited maiden was by this time in a fever of apprehension; and although afraid of pronouncing a name which instinct had almost placed on her tongue, yet at length reddening to the very roots of her hair, she said, with one hand extended, "Is it the Princess?"

"You have said it," answered the humpback, as if angry at

the word having been taken out of his mouth. "Unless I am one of those ungifted asses who do not know the difference between the way in and the way out of their stable, I am certain of this fact, although it has never been hinted at to me by any one of God's creatures."

"How in the name of Allah, then," said Zulma, "do you know it?"

"How should I but by making deep thoughts," said the barber, "by putting seven and seven together—by seeing, hearing, coming, going, asking, remaining silent, and by exerting all that talent which none but a humpback can possess? In the first place, who knows what took place in the open country near the passes of Sawachi, where they met and talked; and what's more, saw each other face to face? Why does the Princess on all occasions put forth the hand of protection when he is crossing over the plank of danger? Why has she taken up her constant abode in the King's turret which looks upon the dwelling of the hostage; and why, when I told her that he had at length consented to receive you as his wife, did these eyes behold her confusion, her agitation, and the departure of colour from her cheek, as if her soul was about taking leave of her body? You see then that the Goozoo is no ass, and that the wit which God has put into his head does not lie there to rust like a Khorassant blade in a bad scabbard?"

Zulma had paid the utmost attention to all he had said; and then, with a long-drawn sigh, gave a slow and unwilling assent to his conclusions, as if the weight of Demawend had been placed upon her breast. At length she said, "But do you think that Zohrab has given up his soul to her also?"

"Upon that head I cannot speak with the same certainty. He is known to be constantly upon his terrace, and he has shown much obstinacy in rejecting you; but men have hearts for many wives—they can love often and marry often. Besides his head must be full of other matters. He is a personage—he has a country which looks up to him—in fine he is a man, really and truly a man."

These remarks seemed to afford some consolation to Zulma, and increased her desire to try her skill once more to enslave the heart of our hero, which she intended to do upon the very

first opportunity. After having laid a scheme for watching the actions of the Princess and her attendants, in order more fully to ascertain how well or ill founded might be their suspicions, they parted.

CHAPTER XVII.

The wisest man must sometimes change the colour of his beard.

PERSIAN PROVERB.

THE subjection of Mazanderan had long been the object of the Shah's policy, and anxious to impress his former friend and rival, Zaul Khan, with an idea of his greatness, he determined to receive him with the utmost magnificence. The years which had elapsed since last they met, had left but a slight impression upon their respective minds of each other's person. Upon the frame and countenance of an eunuch, an appearance of premature age settles the cast of his features even from youth, and the changes are not so strong as upon the man, whose beard, like the verdant foliage of nature, shows by the variety of its tints through which of the seasons of his career the owner of it is then passing. The Shah's superior good fortune, his rise from being a wanderer and an adventurer to the possession of a throne, were subjects in his mind of great exultation; and as he thought that success is always the test of merit, although his ostensible creed was that it was the gift of fate, so he longed to exhibit himself to his coming guests in all the splendour and glory with which his good fortune had clothed him.

The Turcomans, upon whom the magnificence of a court would have a salutary effect, had long ceased to appear at Tehran, and upon their minds too he wished to make impressions of his power. Their ideas of wealth and greatness were founded upon the possessions of rural life. He who possessed most sheep, most mares, most horses, and who was at the

head of most tents, was in their estimation the greatest personage. The king knew this, therefore he took pains to make great displays of his cavalry, of his finest horses, to dress his horsemen in their best armour, and adorn them with the most brilliant arms; and as they, the livers in tents, but very imperfectly knew the use of cannon, he determined also to astonish their minds on that head. With that view, in the centre of the great maidan adjacent to the palace, he stationed a line of artillery, consisting of cannon of various calibre, which had been brought with great labour from the palace of Ispahan, whither they had been collected by the Shabs of the Sefi dynasty; and placed them under the care of a well-dressed corps of gunners.

The avenues to the great hall of audience were lined with dense rows of musqueteers. The hall itself was opened; its great curtain extended. The marble throne, principally composed of the diaphonous stone of Tabreez, and sculptured and inscribed in various forms, was prepared for the Shah's reception; whilst the many fountains in the great court were made to play on the occasion. This hall was looked upon as one of the wonders of Persia, and had been painted and ornamented with a degree of splendour unknown since the time of Shah Sefi, who was supposed to have exhausted all the magnificence and ingenuity of his day, upon the far-famed *Chehel sitoon*, or forty pillars in his palace at Ispahan. Open in front to every breeze, it was supported by curiously-carved pillars, inlaid in their different flutings and compartments with looking-glasses. Its sides, divided and subdivided into compartment, were painted in the richest arabesques, whilst on one side was seen a large historical painting, from the hand of the celebrated Ali Murad of Shiraz, in which the king, at the head of his gholams, was seen making a charge against a body of Russians, who, notwithstanding the hollow square in which they were placed, were becoming the victims of their temerity in attempting to make a stand before the impetuosity of the Persians. Its floors were spread with the choicest Herat carpets. The skirtings of the walls were composed of the richest veined Tabreez marbles; and its ceiling was carved into the most beautifully designed meanders and fret-work. The mass of verdure and spouting waters which met the eye, upon

looking from its recesses, made it at once a delightful retreat, as well as a dignified hall for the position of a monarch's throne.

The principal officers of state were stationed at their posts. The chief executioner sat at the principal gate. The great master of ceremonies was seated in the small entrance room, ready to receive and introduce the strangers; and every object of luxury and wealth, which could be placed with advantage to catch the eye, was displayed.

At a fortunate hour before noon-day prayer, the embassy entered the great court of the palace, when the artillery fired a salute, more, 'tis said, to inspire awe than as a mark of respect: before the 'Sublime Entrance' were placed two mounds of human heads, by way of mementos of the Shah's power, which were carefully reported to have been recently sent from some rebel districts on the confines of Georgia.

After having been obliged to wait some considerable time in the room of the master of ceremonies, at length it was announced, that the Shah would receive the embassy.

He was seated on his throne, surrounded by a throng of the most brilliantly arrayed courtiers and attendants. He himself was dressed so entirely with jewelry, that as the sun glanced upon him, the eye could scarcely meet the beautiful and magnificent resplendence. A crown, in the front of which shone conspicuous a diamond of immense size, was placed on his head, whilst a pair of armlets or *bazubends*, those distinguishing badges of Persian royalty, also composed of stones of immense value, were distinguished on the upper limb of each arm; here glistened those two famous diamonds the *koh nûr* and the *deriah nûr*, the mountain, and the sea of light, which had been seized by Nadir Shah among the spoils of the Moguls at the siege of Delhi, and upon which the Persians now looked as talismans which gave their possessor a lawful claim upon the throne.

His sword was placed across his knees; nothing could exceed the richness of its belt and sheath; a resplendent dagger glittered in a girdle of incalculable value, whilst he was backed by a pillow, so inlaid with precious stones, that it looked like a work of mosaic. But with all this his appearance was scarcely human; a dressed skeleton would have filled his place as well;

at best he became a living illustration of the vanity of life. The jewels in which his person was incased, were contrasted with the ghastliness of his features, whilst those same features seemed to destroy the value of the jewelry.

But still how dreaded a king was he to his subjects! They could not attach ridicule to any thing belonging to one who had gained power and a throne by superiority of intellect, and which he had exercised in elevating their country to great eminence among the nations of Asia. There was something so uncommon in the circumstance of a being, so degraded in his person, raising himself to kingly power, that that circumstance alone gave the character of the marvellous to his appearance, and surrounded him by feelings of awe and mystery, highly conducive to the establishment of his power.

Repeated discharges of artillery took place when the king seated himself on the throne, and "the Shah is seated" rang from mouth to mouth throughout the courts, when a general prostration was made. The kalioun of state, a magnificent bauble resplendent with the most costly jewelry, stood in front of the king elevated on an enamelled pedestal; youths of the greatest beauty, dressed in every luxury of costume that Persian ingenuity could devise, stood in a row bearing the bow and arrow, the sword, the shield, the battle-axe, two magnificent crowns, and the ewer and basin of state, all resplendent with precious stones, and when every thing was arranged, the general grouping of the Shah and his brilliant cortége, was equal to the most finished picture ever pourtrayed, either by painting or imagination, of oriental magnificence.

The deputation from Asterabad proceeded in stately order through the long avenues and broad courts of the palace, headed by Shir Khan Beg who had been appointed its *mehmander*, and who took care to exhibit all his airs and attitudes to the surrounding spectators, until it was received by the head master of ceremonies. He having taken his staff of office in hand, with the greatest solemnity proceeded onwards, the whole assembled company making their stated prostrations, until they stood before the throne, in the court below.

The master of ceremonies then proclaimed with an audible voice, "that the chiefs of Asterabad and the elders of the Turcomans, having arrived with presents to the king of kings,

claimed permission to rub their foreheads against the threshold of his gate, and place themselves at his disposal." The Shah upon this was just on the point of saying the usual "*Khosh amedeed!*" you are welcome, when his ferocious eye in an instant flashed unexpected fire, and his whole features assumed an expression of doubt and suspicion. In countries where the blessings of freedom are known, the expression of the king's face is not scrutinized with the same degree of interest, as it is in those unhappy regions, where the contracted brow, the bitten lip, and the indignant attitude, acting like a barometer of public security, tell at once that danger is gathering in the political horizon. The Shah, looking steadfastly at the chief of the deputation, exclaimed "Where is Zaul Khan? Who is this man?" Mustafa Khan (for it was Zohrab's uncle, who was prepared with his answer), exclaimed, "As I am your sacrifice, the hour was not fortunate when Zaul Khan left his house. It is evident that he has been struck with the evil eye; and we, who are the servants of the Prophet, must bow our heads before the decrees of destiny. Although his coming is uncertain, yet he comes; he may be here at any moment. In the meanwhile, let the Shah receive the prayers of his servants."

All this while the Shah's anger was visibly on the rise. He looked with eyes of suspicion and penetration upon the speaker. They wandered from him towards the Turcoman chiefs, who having lived all their lives in the seclusion of the remote plains of Kipchak, were totally unacquainted with any splendour excepting that which their rude though numerous tents might afford,—these simple men were awed by all that surrounded them, but when they witnessed the hideous face of the sovereign, looking like their evil genius, their hearts began to quake within them. He scowled at Mustafa Khan with every expression of contempt; and, when he had finished his speech, exclaimed, "Are ye come all this way, O men of nought! to laugh at the Shah's beard, and to turn his court into a receptacle for a gang of ragamuffins as ye are? Whose dogs are these?" said he, turning towards his Grand Vizir. "What was passing in your head, when you allowed our presence to be polluted by their odious persons?"

The Vizir, in astonishment, answered, "I also am in great amaze. I have been deceived. As I am your sacrifice, cer-

tainly, every impression was made upon my mind that Zaul Khan was here, and headed the deputation."

This produced a great sensation, and an anxiety of look and whispering took place throughout the assembled courtiers. No one seemed to be at his ease. Every body accustomed to the temper of the king knew well what such expressions of word and look foreboded,—less than this had frequently led to instant acts of cruelty and bloodshed, and had not certain restraints of policy interfered, it is most likely that on the very spot immediate death would have been the fate of those men who had determined to play a deep and desperate game. The sensitive monarch began to feel at every succeeding moment that he had been deceived, and that his beard was laughed at. There was a certain twitching of his hideous mouth, an occasional uplifting of his scanty eye-brow, and a small vibration of his large ears, which the initiated in his looks well knew portended mischief. Like the first indications of rage in the tiger, when the stiffened bristles of the nose, the stretching of the limbs, and the out-spreading of the claws, put the keeper on his guard, so the Vizir, and his own immediate attendants, instantly armed their minds with ready wit, and their nerves with fresh strength, to counteract whatever of mischief or imprudence might result from the threatening ebullition. After sundry contortions and vain attempts to keep up the dignity of his throne, at length, unable to control himself, he roared out :

"Take these dogs' fathers hence; sweep our courts of them, and their ill-timed presents; tie them hand and foot, and let them be hostages for the good behaviour of their chief!" Immediate execution was about taking place, and a general excitement against them had made itself manifest, when a stranger, one who had never been seen before at a court, a dervish of most imposing manner and appearance, was seen making his way towards the presence. His person was in every way such as to inspire respect. Tall, erect, and broad-shouldered, with an air of mystery and wildness, which men of his profession know so well how to throw around them, awing the ignorant and sometimes astonishing the better informed, he looked towards the throne undaunted and unabashed. Taking full advantage of the privileges allowed his character, he stalked forwards without let or hindrance, and taking his stand immediately opposite the

king, raising himself up to the full height of his person, with his right hand extended, he said, in a solemn and audible voice, “*Hak, Hak!* justice, justice!”

The Shah, who held dervishes and holy men in the highest respect, and who had sufficient worldly wisdom never to wound the popular prejudices on that head, waved his hand to stop the departure of the deputation, and in a softened tone, though still sufficiently excited to make his voice of awful import, said, “Man, ‘tis well thou wearest a dervish’s garb, or else short would be the distance between thy neck and the sabre’s edge. Who art thou, and what wouldest thou with the Shah?”

The Dervish, stooping down, picked up a few grains of dust from beneath his feet, and holding it up in the air, exclaimed :

“ Then seest thou this? ‘tis what we both shall be.
Equals we’re not, but equals we shall be.
Sacred the dust of him alone shall be
Who justice loves, ‘tis *that* I want of thee.”

“And wherefore sayest thou that the Shah is unjust?” said the king. “If fools will venture into the lion’s den, and play with its teeth, will they not get bitten? If fate hath made us a Shah, respect is as much our due as worship and adoration are due to God, whose decrees we follow. By what rule do you cast up your account? If you have only brought your fine words here to make the capable, you have brought them to a bad market.”

“Justice without investigation,” said the Dervish, “is worse than hospitality without food. When the passions of a king act without an appeal to his understanding, better for his subjects were it had they been born without heads.”

“Man,” said the Shah, roused by the severity of these remarks, “are you come to revile the Shah on his throne? If you be a dervish, keep to your fasts and your mortifications; go sit in a corner, set an exemple of holiness; count your beads, and say your *namaz*. Leave the affairs of government to those who are appointed by Allah to direct them.”

“Allah! the great, the merciful, the all-seeing!” said the dervish, with great reverence and with every appearance of humility, “speaks to the hearts of kings in various ways. Some-

times through events of consequence, sometimes through the humblest agents, as in my poor person. The prudence of the pißmire is a lesson to Aflatoon. When the poor dervish sounds his horn, let the king think of humility."

"Humility!" said the Shah, "what more humility would you require than what we have exercised? Is it nothing to agree to receive rebels on the footing of independent men? Humility may do well for a dervish, but it is a sin in the ruler of kingdoms when it leads to the abasement of his power."

"There is humility proper to kings, as there is humility proper to dervishes," answered the zealot. "The poor man wears a threadbare *caba*, whilst the king clothes his person in shawl and brocade; still both are clothed. Let the king lend his attention to the cases brought before him, let him decide with humility, and exercise his power with discretion."

"Whilst you talk of humility exercise it yourself, O man," said the Shah. "If you come here to stop the course of justice, take care lest yourself are carried away in the stream thereof."

"Would that it were so," said the Dervish unmoved, "death is the friend to those who have nothing to live for. Take my leopard skin, and you have nothing else to take from the Dervish Hezzarpicheh, unless it be his own skin, to which you are welcome! but no, death is far from him; though despised he may be, yet still he may foresee events which are closed to the eye of worldly power."

"Ah! a prophet too," said the Shah, as he thought awhile; "here, sir prophet!" said he, fumbling in his breast for something which he shortly drew out enclosed tightly in his hand, "advance—if you can foretell events, here tell me what this hand encloses. Upon this proof of your sanctity depends your footing here."

The Dervish without the smallest hesitation stept forwards, ascended from the court into the dewan khaneh, and approaching the throne looked at the king's extended hand with fixed attention, and then with a loud and emphatic voice exclaimed:

" Sons of Isau, rejoice!
A true believer grasps your sacred cross!
Sons of Irân, beware!
The Christian's triumph is the Moslem's loss!"

Upon hearing these words, the king's countenance underwent a visible alteration. It first exhibited unmixed surprise, then doubt, and at length it softened into respect. He kept a profound silence for some minutes, eyeing with intense interest the Dervish, who stood unmoved before him. He seemed irresolute what to do; he perceived that what had just taken place produced a great sensation among those who had witnessed it. Violence gradually gave way to gentleness, and humility took the place of pride. Slowly replacing in his breast what he had drawn from it, he arose, and in the face of all the court invited the Dervish to be seated, saying, "O Dervish! thou art indeed a man of God; the place where thou standest is honoured. Seat thyself, in the name of the Prophet! and forgive whatever one so worthless as I have said."

The Dervish waved his hand and said, "Give me a bed of ashes, and invite me there; the Dervish Hezzarpickeh will say *be cheshm!* upon my eyes be it:—but a throne is only fit for a king; there let him sit, there let the miseries and vanities of life sit with him. Oppress no man—forgive injuries—seek peace and be just. What else have I to say? give me a dismissal, and I will go into my corner and say prayers for your soul."

"However the Shah," said the king, "may turn his countenance away from impostors and those who laugh at other men's heards, so much the more does he reverence men of undoubted sanctity. Thou hast said well, O man of God! See, this is a Christian's gift," at the same time he exhibited to the astonished assembly a small crucifix. "In truth thou hast dealings with other beings than mortals. Thou must take up thy abode at our court; all things shall be provided thee; forthwith our steps will be fortunate."

"A dervish can never be a courtier," said the wanderer; "give me a corner to sit in, and I want nothing more."

"My city, my palace, my kingdom are the refuge of those who seek protection, shall they not be open to such men as thou? And the Shah's orders shall be given that no molestation shall ever be offered thee. Be it as thou desirest. Thou art dismissed."

The Dervish then withdrew, with the same commanding look that he came, whilst every one present eyed him with the awe which a supernatural being might inspire. He looked neither

on one side nor the other. All the respect which was proffered to him seemed below his attention, and swinging himself in hasty strides from the palace, he was lost in the mazes of the city.

In the meanwhile the Shah sat for some time in thoughtful mood ; and mildness having taken place of anger, he dismissed the Asterabad deputation with expressions of grace and protection, and ordered that every attention should be paid to them during their stay in Tehran. He gave directions that the Dervish should be sought for, invited to take up his abode at the Shah's gate, and an honourable maintenance allotted to him. He then ordered his Prime Vizir to follow him into his *khelvet* or private apartment, and the court broke up.

When they had got there, the king seated on his carpet, the Vizir standing before him, a long pause ensued. Aga Mohammed Shah, like most Persians, was addicted to superstitions of every kind. He had the greatest respect for holy men, observed scrupulously all fasts and mortifications, his arms were burthened with charms and talismans, and he scarcely ever made a step without an astrologer at his elbow. Among his numerous talismans he had recently made the acquisition of a crucifix, which a Roman Catholic priest had presented him, and which he thought might prove a preservative whenever he risked himself in battle against the Georgian and the Caucasian tribes. He therefore wore it suspended by a string round his neck ; but he had scrupulously kept this fact secret, and when he heard it divulged in a manner which appeared to him most miraculous, so publicly and so unexpectedly, the effect produced on his mind was such as might be anticipated.

"We are all astonishment," said he to Hajji Ibrahim ; "did you see the miracles performed by that man of God ? This must be the thirteenth Iman. What news have you of him ? Did you ever see any thing like him before ?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said the Grand Vizir, "this is a thing which passes my comprehension. The days of miracles are gone by ; I have heard of one, however, among the *Hezareh* who feeds multitudes from one cauldron of rice, and who knows ? perhaps this may be the man. Your slave will cause enquiries to be made."

"Go, go," said the Shah, "in truth my head goes round with surprise. If these dogs of Asterabadis are protected and sit

under the shade of a prophet, we must have patience. They said that Zaul Khan is soon to be forthcoming; we will have a few days' patience. In the meanwhile let the eye of watchfulness be constantly fixed upon them, and see that Zohrab the hostage has no communication with them. Upon thy head be it."

The Vizir was then dismissed, and immediately orders were issued that Zohrab's confinement should be stricter than ever, and that so it should remain until the arrival of Zaul Khan.

CHAPTER XVIII.

When maidens blush and faint withal,
White-head beware! thy child may fall;
Some Yusuf lurks behind yon wall.

At this time, three subjects occupied the public mind in Tehran above all others: the Dervish Hezzarpieh and the Asterabad deputation, Zohrab's marriage with Zulma, and the lady Amima's drooping state of health. In the bazaars, at the king's gate, in the baths, along the public maidans, men and women talked of nothing else; but what principally interested them, inasmuch as it in some measure had reference to their own security, was the health of the Princess. The kindness of her disposition, and her readiness to interpose her good offices with the Shah, whenever some unhappy creature was in disgrace, had so endeared her to the people, that every thing relating to her well-being was sure to meet with the readiest sympathy. It was a current report that she was ill; that the colour had fled her cheeks, the brilliancy of her eye was dimmed, and an universal langour appeared to pervade her person and manner. The Shah himself had caught the alarm; he had visited her several times, and had tried by every inquiry to ascertain the cause of her disorder. The Hakim Bashi had been frequently consulted, but his skill had been completely baffled.

He could not discern to which class of disease to assign her indisposition, for he could neither place it to the hot nor the cold ; at one time, when treating it as a cold disorder, he would order a cooling diet, cucumbers, water-melons, cool sherbets, and ice, a coolness would ensue, which made him have recourse to tea, wine, and saffron. As for the affections of the mind, they never came within his consideration, "for what affections," said he, "could a Persian woman pretend to have?" Of every thing that the heart of woman could wish, he knew she had more than abundance. No sooner had the thought of a dress or an ornament entered her head, than she was sure to possess it in a few hours after, therefore he argued she could not pine for that; if the vision of some dainty dish, some new composition of *halwa* ever passed through her mind, she was sure to see it realised in a substantial form the next day. Love, he maintained, could not have entered into her breast, for the likeness of man she never saw, excepting indeed the ghostlike form of her uncle the Shah, or an indifferent likeness of him in the khajeh bashi—therefore that passion, the doctor concluded, was out of the question. Every one then agreed that in some manner unknown, and by some peculiar obliquity of vision, she must have been struck by the glance of an evil eye. Every old woman about the court, who could by any chance have cast her eye upon the Princess in an unlucky hour, was carefully examined ; a register of all squints was made ; those who had the reputation of possessing an ill-boding vision, it was said that the Shah had threatened with extermination : at all events, all such individuals were ordered, on pain of death, to keep out of the Princess's way, and none but pleasing faces to stand before her, and none but pleasing speeches and sounds to be made near her. Nightingales were conveyed to her groves, doves cooed about her ; all owls, bats, and ugly reptiles were driven from her, and concerts of sweet voices and musical instruments were ordered to charm her ears. The Shah, by way of engaging her mind in what he too fatally thought must be a cheerful occupation, urged her to superintend the projected marriage ; by this means, the finest stuffs for dresses were constantly brought for her inspection. At one time a costly pair of trowsers, stiffened with brocade, were exhibited ; at another the fascinating *jubbah* of Cashmere shawl, compressing into the smallest com-

pass the waist, that pride and ambition of Persian women, was tried by all around, and she whom it fitted was complimented. Then turquoises (that stone so esteemed, the emblem of good fortune) were showered down before her, whilst diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and sapphires, brought from the royal treasury, were exhibited to her eyes, by way of destroying the evil charm. But these attractions evidently only aggravated the disorder. Recourse was also had to the arts of the hump-back, and he willingly would have cross-examined the Princess upon the state of her mind and health, had she allowed it, but she drove him away with horror. At length it struck the Shah that the Dervish Hezzarpicheh might be of use to her, and he instantly ordered that he should be brought before him.

He was easily found, and when the king's wishes were intimated to him, he followed the messenger who had been sent, without the smallest hesitation.

Upon appearing a second time before the Shah, his majesty looked at him with new interest, scrutinizing his person in the same manner as one does who thinks he has seen a face before. This scrutiny did not appear to be agreeable to the Dervish, who, although he kept his former firm and unawed tone, still would have felt happier to have been passed over unobserved.

However, the Shah addressed him in a respectful and confidential manner; he described the various symptoms of his niece's disorder, the apprehensions entertained concerning its result, the conjectures made as to its cause; he complained of the ignorance of his doctors, minutely detailed all that had been done for her, and concluded by making such an eulogium of the dervish's wisdom and penetration, as to be confident that a visit from him would at once be the means of explaining that which hitherto was unexplained.

The dervish heard every thing which the king had to say, with the profoundest attention, and, in answer, observed, that until he had conversed with the Princess, and had seen as much of her person as it was proper for ascertaining the state of her case, of course he could say nothing. "But, after all," said he in conclusion, "whatever is God's; we are God's creatures, and I, who am less than dust, am the least of them."

The Shah then ordered the Khajeh Bashi to request the Princess to be in readiness to receive a visit from the holy man, and having desired the dervish to attend her summons, he dismissed him.

Amima was seated as usual in her own apartment, endeavouring to draw her mind from the unpermitted subject, which was too apt to gain ascendancy over it. When the intended visit of the holy man was announced, although she had heard the whole story of his miraculous penetration, and in some measure partook of the universal respect which he had inspired ; yet, knowing as she did, how much beyond the reach of medicine or of human art lay the cause of her disorder, she shrunk from the scrutiny which this person would probably exercise. However, as she could not, in justice to the interest which her uncle took in her welfare, refuse to receive him, she declared herself ready to accede to the Shah's commands.

The curtain of her own apartment was lowered, and it was so arranged that the dervish should remain without, and that no part of her person should meet his sight but such as he positively insisted upon examining. At length it was announced that he was come, and she was invited to approach the curtain. Mariam, her attendant, was the only person in the room with her, whilst the Khajeh Bashi attended the dervish on the outside. The Princess placed herself near the curtain, and footsteps from without assured her that her examiner was there also. At length a solemn and impressive voice said, " Daughter, we hear bad news of thee; we hear that thy mind and thy affections are diseased, and not thy body ; is it so ?"

" What can I say," said Amima, in a subdued voice, " it is even as God pleases."

" That is well," said the voice, " God is our God through life and death ; he visits the faithful in various ways, and tries their hearts with a view to their good. Hast thou nothing to reproach thyself with, O daughter of Islam ?"

A deep sigh answered that question.

" Thou art a king's child ; thou livest with a king ; and art indeed a queen. Whatever thou wantest it is thine : thou hast only to wish and thou art gratified ; still thy heart longeth for that which it cannot attain. Is it not so ?"

"What can I say?" said Amima in an uncertain tone, happy to have a curtain between her and her visiter, to hide the blush which overspread her cheek at this question.

"Hast thou ever seen the face of unpermitted man?" said the voice in a sterner and severer tone.

"Perhaps, yes," said Amima with dignity, "'tis difficult to open one's eyes without seeing God's creatures."

"Hath unpermitted man ever seen thy face?" said the voice in a rather severer tone.

Amima's bosom heaved with agitation upon being called upon to answer; she knew not what to say, but asked for a repetition of the question.

The dervish then said with a loud voice, "Let all bystanders retreat; this is between me and the Princess." The Khajeh Bashi and Mariam retreated. He then said, "Daughter, I must feel thy pulse; thy hand."

When she had placed her arm in his hand, the curtain still intervening, she felt his head advancing towards her, and then, in a low and mysterious whisper, he said, "Amima, thou hast seen Zohrab!"

These words produced an immediate effect—she struggled to withdraw her hand—he persisted in keeping hold of it—her heart beat almost audibly—her agitation was intense; but when next she heard these words, these unexpected dreaded words, "Amima, thou lovest Zohrab!" the blood rushed back from her heart; it forsook her face; a universal tremor possessed her frame, and only supported by the dervish who held her hand, she would have fallen prone into a swoon, had she not been upheld by Mariam, who, seeing her state, rushed to her assistance.

This brought forward the Khajeh Bashi; but in the struggle the curtain was drawn back, and the dervish caught a sight of the face of the princess. The guardian of the women, alarmed at what had happened, cried out for help, and women and eunuchs came running from all parts, whilst the dervish, cool and unmoved, turned his steps whence he came, and left the walls of the harem.

In the meanwhile, report spread abroad that the Princess Amima, having been visited by the new dervish, had suddenly been struck to the ground by the mere power of his touch, so

powerful and terrific a charm did he wield ; and that scarcely had he done so, when he disappeared in a miraculous manner, nobody knew how.

The whole of the royal anderoon was thrown into confusion ; the doctor-in-chief was sent for, all the old women were consulted, and ere a quarter of an hour had elapsed, such was the consternation within and without the palace, that it might have been supposed the greatest misfortune had overtaken the community. A report of what had befallen the Princess was immediately forwarded to the Shah, and he lost no time in ordering the dervish to appear before him.

In the meanwhile, Amima, having recovered from her swoon, requested that she might be left alone, and when every body was gone from before her, leaving only Mariam in attendance, she then endeavoured to gather her wandering senses, and to recollect what really had taken place. The words of the dervish still rang in her ears. In vain she inquired who and what this man might be ; she could gain no intelligence further than that he had arrived with the deputation from Asterabad. She carefully kept, even from her confidant, what had been the cause of her sudden seizure, laying it principally to the weakness of her state, and to the necessity of communicating with a strange man, when she was more fit for her bed. Mariam was, however, too penetrating to allow such an excuse to have any weight in her mind, and in the deepest consternation she daily saw her mistress pine and waste away, without any means in her power to redeem her from so wretched a state. Well she knew what was the real cause of her suffering, and after having exhausted every thought in endeavouring to relieve her, she usually remained as much perplexed as at first. There was one expedient to which she sometimes thought of having recourse, but she never could gain sufficient courage to put it into practice.

The dervish having been sought and found, was again conducted before the king.

"We hear strange things of thee," said the Shah. "Thou findest all quiet, and thou leavest all in commotion. What hast thou done ?"

"What cure was ever performed," said the dervish, "without some previous pain ?"

"But we hear of spells and incantations ? Open your eyes,"

said the king, with great affirmation ; “ We are not to be played with. We reward merit, but woe be to deceit. If aught happens to our house, and good fortune turn its back upon us, by the head of the king ! by the head of the king, I swear ! that thy ears would not be worth two copper coins, and thy head the rind of a water melon. Again, I say, dervish, open thy eyes ! ”

“ Would to heaven that patience were to be found in the apothecary’s shop,” exclaimed the dervish, “ then might it be taken by the cupfull, and wisdom might have fair play. What more can the poor dervish say ? but here is his head ; to take it from him were a benefit.”

“ What signifies those lumps of bone and flesh and hair called thy head, to the state of Persia, when through thee perhaps we lose one of the brightest jewels of our crown. Many such as thee exist, but where shall the Shah find another Amima ? Say, man, what hast thou done ? ”

“ Send to thy house and there enquire ? If I have done aught but what is justified by truth, here stands the Dervish Hezzarpicheh, and thou art an absolute king ; but take this with thee. If before twice seven days be expired, he does not remove the cause of the Princess’s complaint, he will himself come, with this cord about his neck instead of round his waist, and say ‘ Bismillah.’ ”

“ Did you hear that ? ” said the king to Sadek, who stood at hand (for this scene took place in the private apartment), “ We take thee at thy word,” said the Shah to the dervish ; “ thou hast worked one miracle, worthy of the blessed Imans, therefore justice is thy due, and the reverence of the Shah thou shalt not want. Be at hand, and when we want thee, we will send for thee.”

The dervish upon this took his leave, and quitting the palace retreated with his usual gait to his cell, a small dark room situated near the residence of the Asterabad and Turcoman deputies, which was not far distant from the royal mosque. Here he remained in apparently religious concealment ; his only furniture a coarse mat, upon which he placed his leopard skin ; his only luxury a pitcher full of water, which he drew himself from an adjoining reservoir.

The reputation of the feat which he had performed before the Shah, had made him an object of attention throughout the city ; the door of his cell was thronged from morning to night

by high and low, rich and poor, all anxious either to receive his advice, to endeavour through his means to gain a glimpse into futurity, or to obtain some preservative against sickness or misfortune. Talismans or charms prescribed by him, or written with his own hand, were in the greatest request. The lover, the avaricious man, the ambitious, the coward, the gambler, all and every profession and station in life, wanted to know something more of their fate or actual being, than was vouchsafed to them from heaven, and to our dervish they came, overflowing with credulity, and ready to acknowledge the power of any miracle, even if worked upon their own persons. It was towards the close of the day upon which he had visited the Princess, when he thought that he should no more be disturbed, that he heard footsteps approaching his door, and looking out he perceived a well-veiled and richly dressed woman alighting from a finely caparisoned mule, held by a young black eunuch. She left her equipage a few paces off, and stept into his dark chamber, in a rather mysterious manner, although without any apparent shyness. After having properly saluted the holy man, she said, "I am come upon a business of consequence, O dervish! it is one of life or death. The renown of your wisdom was spread far and wide throughout the city, and it is to consult you that I am come."

"Life and death are in the hands of God," said the dervish. "Who am I that am to be consulted upon things of such import? But though mean I am, still whatever is in my power, that command. Speak, my ears are yours."

"You must understand almost ere I open my lips," said the lady, "for my words are numbered. I cannot speak plainly all I would say, for I scarcely dare trust even the recesses of my own understanding with the knowledge which is there concealed."

"Speak," said the dervish, "already we know your wishes. You must answer some questions." And then putting himself into an inquisitorial attitude, he said, "You come not for yourself, but for one dearer to you than yourself? Is it so?"

"Allah!" cried the lady. "Even so."

"Still all your own well-being depends upon that of your other self?"

"Yes," said the astonished lady.

" You have acquired a secret known to none but yourself."

" Yes."

" And that secret is that your friend loves. You know 'tis a dangerous love ; that it involves danger if it be indulged, and if it be not indulged, it wastes away the issues of life."

" Oh yes, true, true," said the unknown visiter; " O, tell me, as you are a true believer ! as you revere our holy prophet and love Allah ! tell me what is to be done ?"

" Now open your eyes ; and as you love your soul," said the dervish, " answer me in truth—does your friend hold any communication with the man she loves ?"

" Allah, Allah!" cried the lady ; " as I believe in the Prophet, no, no !"

" Does he know that she loves him ?" said he.

" Perhaps, yes ; perhaps, no," said the maiden after some thought ; " rather yes, than no."

" So—is it ?" said the dervish apparently in deep thought. " Could they meet if they were to try ?"

" *Astaferallah*—Heaven forbid !" said she, " where ? how ? when ? Are there not more guards round the harem than stars in the firmament ? Have the lynxes sharper eyes than they ? Besides, is he not guarded too ?"

" I now understand ;" said he. " Oh ! he is guarded too !"

" Ah ! what have I said !" exclaimed she.

" Suppress your fear," said he, " for all is known to me."

" But what I principally desire of you," said the lady, " is to counteract the evil machinations of two living demons in the form of a man and a woman, whose arts are daily undermining the peace of her, for the well being of whom I have sought your advice."

" They shall be counteracted," said the dervish. " I will cause their livers to drop, their wit shall shrivel up, and they shall remain less than dogs' sons."

" And when will this be ?" said she rather incredulously.

" When !" said the dervish, with an emphatic pause; then in a slow cadence he continued thus :—

" When the Tyrant's wrath is raging ;
When blood 'gainst blood fierce war is waging ;

When innocence for safety flies,
And houseless, friendless, cheerless dies;
When pity from the heart is driven;
Then think of me, and trust in heaven."

Mariam (for the reader need not be told it was she), upon hearing those prophetic words, and having been struck by the wild and awful manner in which they had been delivered, felt alarmed to find herself alone with the dervish, and would have made an abrupt departure; but recollecting herself she said, "But ere I am dismissed, you must give me some immediate remedy. We have every faith in your handwriting. We must be protected by some talisman emanating from your person. And here," said she, holding out a bag of gold, "this will show you we are not unmindful of justice."

"Gold to him who wants but bread and water is like sowing the earth with diamonds; they may enrich it, but it will bring forth no fruit. Take back your pelf; but bear this along with you."

He then took a piece of paper, and writing some few words upon it, he rolled it up, sealed it, and delivering it to Mariam, said, "As you value your own life, and that of your friend, give this paper to her unopened. She alone is to read it; and that the words it contains may effectually enter her soul, let them be washed off, made into a potion, and drunk off. See you to it, but read not the writing."

Having delivered this to her, she took her leave, and forthwith returned to her mistress, for whose preservation, although unknown to her, she had paid this visit. She had long been convinced that her mistress was under the influence of some irresistible agency, exercised over her by the combined arts and intrigues of the humpback and Zulma, and with the greatest faith in the powers of the dervish she determined to try to what extent he might be induced to exert them in her favour.

She found Amima in a calm and resigned frame of mind, for she had just refreshed herself by prayer; with her face resting on her hand, she leant upon the open window frame, and was contemplating the beautiful and tranquil scenery of her ever-verdant and flower-embellished grove, and lending her ear to the many soft notes of the various birds which lived in a happy

security among her cypress and chenar trees. Mariam, on the contrary, approached her with a face full of excitement, and would at once have proceeded to put her scheme into full force, had not her zeal been broken by the voice of her mistress, who, when she saw her enter, turned her head towards her, and said, "Mariam, my soul, where have you been thus long? your place has been empty. I wanted to tell you how much better I feel, and how much happier I am now than I have been for some time past."

"*Al hamdulilah!* praise be to God;" said her attendant, "this is a piece of good news; but *mashallah!* please Heaven, I have brought you something which I trust will ensure the continuance of such a blessing." She then informed her mistress of the step which she had taken; related with all the particularity of woman's narration, the history of her visit to the dervish; endeavoured to give a faithful version of the words of his awful prophecy; and finished by exhibiting with great triumph the precious talisman which she had acquired.

Amima, who shared the common faith of her countrywomen in talismans and supernatural agencies, received the paper with great appearance of interest, looked at it, inspected the seal, and having expressed her gratitude to Mariam for all the trouble and interest she had taken in her behalf, said, "Ah, Mariam! if it will but secure me a continuance of the peace which I now enjoy, you will indeed have conferred a benefit upon me, which I shall never have it in my power to repay. Now tell me what is to be done?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said her attendant, "you and you only are to break open the seal; you and you only are to read the words written within; and you then are to take them inwardly, in order that they may remain fixed for ever on your heart."

"Let me see them," said Amima, with a flush on her cheek and a beating heart; whilst she repeated to herself in smothered accents, her "*Bismillah il rakhman il rakheem*, in the name of God be merciful," &c.; and then with a slow and cautious hand broke open the seal, and unrolled the paper. She had scarcely half opened it, when, in the middle, these words in large characters met her eyes—"As you would live, forget Zohrab; forget! forget! forget!" The paper fell from her

hands; the colour forsook her cheeks; a quick heaving of her breast seemed to convulse her throat; and covering her face with both her hands, she imposed deep silence upon herself. Mariam stood for some time like one petrified; her faith in the charm, and in the author of it, increased an hundredfold when she witnessed the power and suddenness of its effect. She was fearful by any act of hers to disturb the state into which it had thrown her mistress, conceiving that she might by her officiousness destroy the intended effects; but when she saw how unmoved she remained, and knowing that something was still to be done, quickly she stooped down, and without looking at the contents of the paper, immersed it into a basin of water, until the writing was completely washed out of it, and then, in the gentlest manner and with the softest accents, approached her mistress, entreating her to drink the prescribed draught. She was surprised and alarmed, instead of being answered in her usual quiet manner, to see the suddenness and abruptness of her action. Roused from her apparent lethargy, and seizing the cup, she forthwith threw the contents on the ground, exclaiming with a face beaming with violent passion, "Never! never! never! oh Allah, oh holy prophet! let me die. But never! never! never!"

Mariam would have sought an explanation, and was about addressing her mistress; but when she found that she wished to be left alone, without further intrusion she took her leave. Amima remained absorbed in thought for some time. In vain she turned over in her mind who this person could be, and how he had penetrated a sentiment which, she flattered herself, was confined to her own breast, and who appeared so averse to her entertaining any thoughts of Zohrab. She began to fear that she was under the influence of some agency more than human, and willingly would have consulted Mariam, had she not feared that some fatal consequence might occur to Zorab. She determined, however, in conformity to her own sense of what was right, as well as to the admonition of her mysterious monitor, to endeavour to steel her heart against him, and in this temper we shall for the present leave her.

CHAPTER XIX.

The elephant caught in the pit, said to itself, "Let me but once get out, and I will never be here again."

LOCMAN.

ZOHRAB's confinement, since the arrival of the deputation from Asterabad, had been so strictly enforced, that excepting his own attendant he had scarcely seen a living soul. He had endeavoured by every means in his power to gain permission to communicate with his father, whom he and every body else expected to see as its chief; but what was his dismay when he heard that he was not there! vainly had he set every engine to work, in order to be allowed an interview with his uncle, and his old friends the Turcoman chiefs; but the Shah was inexorable, and the vizir himself, who suspected that there might be some hidden scheme at work, was as strict in his prohibition as his royal master. He was, however, assured that this severity would be but of short duration, since, if there was any truth in the words of the deputies, Zaul Khan would soon appear. He endeavoured therefore to arm himself with patience, and in the meanwhile, through the means of his intelligent servant, the youthful Ali, to acquire as much information upon what was going on as possible.

Since this redoubled strictness, the preparations for his marriage had been suspended, and he had been saved the disagreeable necessity of hearing any more upon that subject. The long and weary days which he passed thus secluded, were cheered by no other recreation than an excursion to the terrace of his apartment, where, although the now closed and cheerless turret offered no immediate object for his contemplation, it still afforded him a never-failing subject for rekindling recollections, and warming his imagination.

It was on the evening of the second day after Mariam's visit

to the dervish, just as the day was drawing to a close, when as usual Zohrab was seated in solitary and melancholy mood upon his terrace, that he heard a noise at the window of the turret. Of a sudden the lattice opened, and he saw an arm and hand thrust forth; it held something, which instantly was thrown towards him, and then disappeared. The object fell almost at his feet. In the greatest anxiety he picked it up, and found that it consisted of a bunch of violets. He turned them over and over, not knowing exactly what to make of so strange a present, when, to his surprise, he discovered within the heap a small note, neatly rolled up and directed to himself. He opened it and found these words:

"Life depends upon your acquiescence. Be prepared, stout in heart and firm of purpose, to follow whithersoever you shall be led to-morrow ere the first call of evening prayer, and do whatever your guide shall ordain."

We leave the reader to imagine his surprise. He had too exalted an idea of the excellence and the sense of propriety of the object of his love, to think that she could have made these advances. It was impossible that the hand and arm which he had seen could be hers; and still, who amongst the females of the harem but herself had access to the turret—indeed, her attendant Mariam, he thought, might not be that model of perfection which her mistress was; but still, could she have ventured upon such an invitation to him, and not have dreaded the horrid results which must await her in case of discovery? However perplexed he might be in his endeavours to discover who his friend could be, and however aware he was of the danger of the enterprize to which he was invited, still he determined, happen what might, not to shrink from it. The first words of the note were quite a sufficient incentive, and made him conceive that the welfare of Amima might in some manner be implicated, for he was aware of her wretched state both of mind and body.

The time that was to elapse before the beginning of his adventure was taken up in conjecture. He felt that his affairs were now drawing to a crisis, and indeed so weary was he of confinement and of the miseries of inactivity, that he rejoiced at any occurrence, whatever might be its result, which would emancipate him from his prison. The night passed away—the morning came—noon-day prayer was announced—and the day

began to draw to a close—when the door of his court-yard was opened by his servant Ali, who handed in a tall woman closely veiled. There was much precaution in her manner, and it immediately struck him that she was in fact his promised guide. Ali preceded her by a few steps, and having in a hurried manner informed his master that his mother was come to speak a few words to him, he withdrew. She immediately followed, and ere she spoke she looked well about the apartment, and, having ascertained that she was alone with Zohrab, she straight held out a violet to him, and said, “Bismillah—let there not be a moment’s delay.”

“What am I to do, in God’s name?” said the anxious youth.

“Put on this veil, these *chakchurs*, these slippers, immediately,” said she; “keep a steady silence, and allow Ali to conduct you thus to the gate of the harem; there you will be met and conducted by another guide, and then God protect your ways! May the blessed Hussein be your protector!”

“But explain,” said Zohrab, “who sends you? who am I to see?”

“You will know all in good time. Oh my good Aga! I am the mother to that child whom you love, and will not willingly bring ashes on your head. Go, in the name of the prophet!”

She then unfolded an ample veil, which was concealed under her own, and helped Zohrab to disguise himself. Having increased the circumference of his head by a shawl, clothed his feet and legs with the ample *chakchurs*, and then covered him completely over with the veil, she consigned him to the care of Ali. She had been permitted by the guard at the gate of the chief executioner’s house to pass, upon a pretext that she was carrying medicine to the hostage, and as Zohrab was about her own height, she was so well personified by him upon his exit, that there was no chance of detection. She remained in his apartment during his absence, in order to keep the door locked against any occasional intruder.

Having passed the guard without detection, Zohrab followed Ali, to whom every sort of privilege was granted, owing to his popularity with the guards and men in office, and then crossed the great maidan, and passed through the palace gate. They hastened through the long passages of the Ark, and at length reached the principal entrance of the women’s apartments.

There he took hold of Ali's hand, and as both the boy and his mother were well known to every one, they passed on unnoticed till they came to the wicket where a guard of eunuchs was stationed. Here Zohrab was obliged to leave Ali; and, with an involuntary tremor, found himself making his way through unknown courts, where, should he be discovered, instant death would not fail to await him. He had passed the first eunuch unnoticed; but, whether his gait caught the observation of a group of others who were seated further on, or whether, not seeing him in company of Ali, they did not recognize him for the late chief huntsman's widow, one of them cried, "Who is that 'weak one' in search of? Give ear—who are you?"

Zohrab walked on heedless of these words; two of the eunuchs arose, and were going to lay violent hands upon him, when an unveiled woman, whom Zohrab immediately recognized to be Mariam, stept from a doorway, and exclaimed with great asperity of accent, "How is this? oh you unfortunate! May not the servants of the Banou pass unnoticed? Shall it be said that the widow of one of the Shah's best servants, favoured by the princess, is stopped in her way to the threshold of royalty? Are ye not ashamed?"

Upon this the eunuchs returned whence they came, not a little abashed at the rebuff, and bowed their heads before her who was almost as powerful as her mistress within the walls in which they stood.

Mariam, making a sign to Zohrab enjoining silence, proceeded with him through several courts, and at length stopped where an extended curtain before a large open window denoted the habitation of an exalted personage. She then made him go through a small door into a narrow court, which led them into a cufish khoneh, where she made him take off his veil and *chakchurs*, and then desired him to wait patiently without stirring hand or foot until she came for him. In vain he desired to know what could be the object of this mystery, and why and wherefore he had been conducted hither. He could get no other answer from his conductress, than the words "silence and patience."

It is necessary to explain that Mariam, urged on by her sincere devotion to her mistress, having in vain tried every scheme to restore her to health, and knowing full well what

was the true cause of her misery, at length had determined, as a last resource, to bring on an interview between her and Zohrab. Had she given a hint of her intention, so well did she know her mistress that it might have been the means of driving her from her presence for ever; she therefore had determined to take all the consequence of such a step upon herself, and to depend upon the all powerful effects of Zohrab's appearance, which she was certain would end in softening her heart to tenderness, and thus at once secure her own pardon, and that most soothing of all assurances to one in love, that her passion was returned in all its violence.

As soon as she had deposited Zohrab in a place of safety, secure from observation, she went in to her mistress, who was seated quietly in her room engaged in her usual occupations. Mariam's object was to induce her to go into the khelwet or secret apartment, common to Persian houses, where the interview might take place without the possibility of interruption, and she succeeded; having persuaded her mistress that she had something of importance to communicate, which she could not do in the open room in which they were.

"And why not here, Mariam?" said Amima smiling. "We are not vizirs or mastofis that have secrets of sufficient importance to require a khelwet."

"Heaven preserve my princess," said Mariam, "from all harm! but your slave has a secret, though she be a slave; and she supplicates her to cede to her wishes."

"So be it," said Amima, "since you desire it; let us go in the name of Allah."

They then proceeded into the private room. Mariam carefully closed and barred the outer door; the princess seated herself, her mind tossed between curiosity and surprise at what was about to happen. Mariam smiling, in the act of leaving the room to return to Zohrab, said, "God grant the happiness of my Banou may be secured. Let her prepare herself for strange things." She then went in to Zohrab, took him by the arm, made him follow her, and without thinking of the consequences at once placed him before her mistress.

Amima's sensations upon seeing this apparition were too overpowering to be repressed. Indignation first roused her upon seeing a man, herself unveiled, in her own sanctuary and

unprotected. She would have fled and called for assistance, but the instant she recognized that man to be Zohrab, the idol of her thoughts, the beloved of her heart, the revulsion which took place in her breast was so great and sudden, that the blood forsook her cheeks, a deadly mist came over her eyes, her limbs refused to do their office, and she fainted hopelessly away.

The extent of her indiscretion at once forcibly struck the imprudent and perplexed Mariam. “*Hai! what have I done?*” she exclaimed in piteous accents. “*She dies, she dies!* Where shall I go? what ashes have fallen upon my head?” She seemed entirely to have lost her reason, and her mistress would probably have received no assistance, had not Zohrab, who now at once had his eyes opened upon his position, immediately rushed to the help of Amira. He sprang to the fountain in the court for water; he chafed her temples, restored circulation to her hands; and so bestirred himself, that little by little his raptures were roused to the utmost pitch by seeing animation gradually return to her beautiful countenance. But when she found herself thus situated, she (the Mussulman maid, who looked upon her virgin character as blasted by the sight of a man even at a distance) could only see in the beloved Zohrab of her imagination, that outlaw of a harem, a man; and therefore the first accents which she uttered were those of horror and indignation at his presence, and at the insult which he had put upon her. “*Go, go!—in the name of Allah, go!—why do you stay?—why came ye?—who are you? You are neither my brother nor my father—go, go!*” She then entreated and ordered Mariam, whose wits seemed to have utterly forsaken her, to send him away. She herself rose to go; when Zohrab, overpowered by his contending feelings, innocent of any evil intention, threw himself on his knees before her; and, in the humblest and most imploring accents, entreated her forgiveness, disavowed any wish of insulting her, and loudly asserted his ignorance of what was about to await him, when he was called upon to assist, as he said, upon a matter of life and death.

This scene had scarcely commenced, ere an endeavour to enter the outer door of the khewet was perceived, and was followed by a knocking. The words, “open, the Shah is coming,” were then distinctly heard. Then, indeed, sense was restored to the whole three; the danger of their position immediately

spoke for itself—and self-preservation took the place of every other feeling. Zohrab's countenance immediately assumed a settled and determined appearance, as if he would say, "I am prepared for every thing."

Amima at once changed from indignation to tenderness. The danger in which her lover stood rushed at once upon her mind; and heedless of every thing, excepting his safety, she said to him in a calm, determined tone—"Here is my hand, Zohrab! If death is to be our lot, let it be thus—better to die thus, than to live separated!"

These words overwhelmed the devoted lover with rapturous joy; and no martyr at the stake ever rejoiced so much at laying down his life for his faith, as Zohrab did in the prospect of so dying for his love. But the fear of death had an immediate and different effect upon Mariam; it instantly brought back all her scattered wits, and roused her to action. She flew to the assailed door, and expostulated with the eunuch, who wanted to gain admission; asserted that her mistress was unwell, and made as much pretext for delay as she could devise. She then returned to Zohrab in the greatest trepidation. Surrounded as the apartment then was by the royal attendants—certain as he would be of meeting the king and his suite, if he wished to make his escape—there seemed no hope of safety. In this dilemma, the knocking at the door was renewed with double violence, and a voice announced that the Shah intended to take the air in the turret. There was no other way to the turret than through this very private room;—dismay and despair overcame them all;—what was to be done? "Hide him here!" said Amima. "Go there!" cried Mariam. Every thing was ediously exposed; and as there are no hiding-places in Persian rooms, it was impossible to secrete him any-where. He could not resume the veil without the certainty of its being torn from him; for no woman in the harem is allowed to appear before the Shah so covered. Thus, in absolute despair, they all three rushed to the turret top. When they got there, and looked at the hopeless height of the building, their courage forsook them, and nothing less than death seemed to be in store. Zohrab, however, taking a calm survey of the surrounding buildings, saw one higher than the rest, to which, had he some rope, or help to rest his hand upon, he thought he might swing himself forwards.

It struck him that his ample veil might, if properly fixed and suspended, lower him down to a considerable distance. Upon this suggestion, Amima immediately offered a Cashmerian shawl, and every handkerchief which she possessed. Mariam did the same; and without the smallest loss of time did they manage to tie them together in such a manner that, when lowered, Zohrab would have apparently but little difficulty in setting foot upon the spot which he had pointed out. His resolution was soon made; one end of the veil was fastened to the middle prop of the casement. The evening's shades, which had now come on were favourable; he was about taking his departure, when, kneeling before his mistress, he took her hand to entreat her forgiveness. Mariam upon this fled down stairs in order to make proper explanations to the impatient eunuchs; and during this absence of all witnesses, the lovers gave themselves up to the rapturous effusions of their long-smothered passion, and in one short minute made more vows of eternal constancy and love than it is supposed lips, eyes, and tongue, could make in so short a time. Just as Zorab was about taking his last farewell, Amima drew from her arm an armlet composed of costly and magnificent emeralds, inscribed with sacred invocations, a favourite talisman long worn by her father, and given by her uncle. "Here," said she, "let this preserve my Zohrab; wear it for Amima's sake; it is the only remembrance she can give him." Zohrah received it with rapture; threw it with ecstasy into his bosom, and bidding a long lingering adieu, stept lightly from the window; and as his person gradually disappeared, he did not cease looking up with the most ardent expressions of endearment to his anxious love, who, with looks of feverish and convulsive interest as she bent over the window, marked his dangerous descent. He had reached the very extremity of the suspended veil and shawls, but it was evident that their length fell short of the expected mark. He swung in suspense in the air, his feet occasionally resting against the turret side. Amima's fears were so roused for his safety, that she would have screamed out for assistance, when of a sudden she saw him impel himself forward, and making a fearful and almost incredible bound, she perceived that he had alighted in safety on the intended spot. She would have thrown herself upon her knees to return thanks to heaven for this

mercy, but she had only time to draw up the pendant veil and shawls before Mariam appeared, followed by the Khajeh Bashi foaming with rage at the impediments placed in the way of the performance of the Shah's commands. "What news is this?" he roared out at the top of his cracked and croaking voice. "What has happened? The asylum of the universe is coming, and every thing is barred and bolted. Is this a harem? or is it a den of rebels?" Mariam, who had perceived that all was well, and from the turret having seen Zohrab landed in safety upon his own terrace, immediately adopted a new tone with the comptroller of the women.

"And who are you, you old carcass without a soul! you old scabbard without a sword!" said she, "that dares use its vile lungs in the presence of our noble Lady Banou in this fashion? Are these her apartments, or are they not? Is she to render an account to such a slip of parchment as you, when or where she chooses to take her rest, and to be free from intrusion? go, cur! and use your yelping throat elsewhere."

"Then the Shah, I suppose, is nothing in your eyes," said he; "but although he may be nothing in yours, he is something in mine, for by a nod of his head he may take off mine, and then what good will my lady's rest do to me?"

"And please Allah he may," said Mariam.

"We'll all teach the Shah to nod;" and taking him to the side of the turret, she showed him a vacant spot. She pointed it out to him, and said, "and there let us trust may your hated noddle be nodded off."

"And what may this be," said the old guardian, seizing the collected veil and shawls which they had not time to untie. "By Allah, if our loved princess was not the princess she is, there would be treason here. In any other harem, a *katl-i-am*, a universal massacre, would ensue."

"And what is it," said Mariam, "but something by which to hang an old whipt cur like yourself? Say but two more words, and all the women in the anderoon shall come at my command, and you shall swing high in air, as a scarecrow, to warn such hideous birds of prey as you from off our premises. Surely our lady and her attendants may invent new veils if they choose!" Upon which she deliberately untied the different knots, and re-

stored the shawls and veil to their original shape, whilst the Khajeh set his officers to prepare the royal seat for the Shah.

During the course of this conversation, Amima, having left the turret, had descended to receive the Shah. On this occasion, the results of Mariam's operations, however fatal at first they promised to be, in favour of her mistress, had in fact proved such as she expected to produce. The short interview which our heroine had had with her lover—that all absorbing and cheering sentiment, the certainty of being loved by the person of one's choice, so soothing to our nature, had infused new life and a brilliant cheerfulness into her whole being. All her miseries appeared at once expelled, and she stood before her uncle a totally different person, both in health and spirits.

This manifested itself so strongly, when she received him, that he was immediately struck with it, and involuntarily exclaimed, "*Mashallah! mashallah!* Wonderful man is the dervish Hezzarpicheh. He promised that ere long our Banou should be restored to health; see what a change has been effected!"

"*Alham du lillah!*" exclaimed all the women present.

"Say," said the king to his niece, "what did the dervish prescribe? Was it performed by talismath or medicine?"

"What can I say?" said Amima, blushing deeply; "whatever has happened, I am grateful that we can receive the king of kings with a white face, and with looks with which he is pleased."

"May I be your sacrifice!" said the chief guardian of the women; "our lady is not only merry in looks, but she is full of pranks and games. She and her vizir, the slave Mariam, would have hanged your Majesty's less than the least, your humble slave."

"You would then have been the highest of the most exalted," answered the Shah, grinning a smile. "Much good may it do ye!"

To this sally every body present laughed, and in their hearts the women longed that their mistress had put her prank into execution, so truly did they hate their appointed protector.

The Shah had in truth been made supremely happy by the improvement which he had remarked in the health and spirits of his niece. His visit to her had been intentionally sudden, for he had harboured a suspicion in his mind that the dervish Hezzarpicheh was not the person whom he represented himself to

be, and he was therefore anxious to judge with his own eyes, before any scheme of deceit could be arranged, how far the promises which he had made as to her recovery were likely to be valid. Instead, then, of wreaking his vengeance upon him, which he was prepared to do for being an impostor, his faith in his power was increased, and his natural impatience and irritability were soothed by the confidence which he had inspired. He allowed the Asterabadian and Tureoman deputies to enjoy every liberty in the city, scarcely required any superintendence of their proceedings, and waited for the arrival of Zaul Khan as an undoubted event.

CHAPTER XX.

*Love lost is like the mare's milk, which the Arab maiden spilt in the sand.
She may cry over it; but she will never get it into the skin again.*

LOVES IN THE DESERT.

THE surprise of the chief huntsman's widow upon seeing Zohrab return by the terrae instead of the door of his dwelling, almost made her look upon him as a supernatural being; and without asking him a single question, she took her departure with true discretion and without delay, determining to seek her son, who was waiting at the gate of the harem to reconduct his master home.

Zohrab had entirely forgotten the danger to which he had been exposed in the enchantment of possessing the love of Amima. He dwelt upon every circumstance of his interview with the solicitude of an enraptured lover. He was as avaricious of every word which she had addressed him, as a miser might be who can never sufficiently count over and feast upon the gold which he has unexpectedly found. What visions of future bliss, what raptures of enjoyment did he not promise to himself, as he allowed his imagination a free range over the bewitching pic-

tures presented to him by hope! His youthful mind, too little practised in the ways of life, and particularly in the schemes of Persian intrigue, could look upon the future friendship of his father and the Shah as certain, and could almost point out the very moment when, as a necessary link to the union of the two states, the niece of the Shah would be united to the son of the powerful chief of Asterabad.

He was in the midst of these visions, when he heard the door of his apartment opened, and to his dismay perceived the well-remembered figure of his mysterious female visiter approach him. This time she did not long preserve her incognito, but at once taking off her veil, disclosed to the eyes of Zohrab the animated and impassioned countenance, the beautiful and seductive form of the ardent Zulma. To retreat was impossible, to turn her away with violence was contrary to the manliness of his nature; but to conceal his disgust, particularly immediately after the rapturous moments of a true passion which he had enjoyed, was impossible. He received her in the coldest manner, and although she seated herself without hesitation, he insisted upon standing before her; thereby intimating his determination to keep himself upon no terms of equality, giving to her that precedence and authority due to his jailer.

"Whence come ye?" said she, with great agitation. "As ye would not die, tell me, have you not been absent?"

"Am I to render an account of myself to whomsoever chooses to question me?" said Zohrab. "If you are my jailer, it is enough that you find me true to my prison."

"What was floating in the air, not a few minutes since," said Zulma, "between yon turret and your terrace? Have you not been visited by some one? My eyes cannot have deceived me."

"There may or there may not be visions floating in the air," said the cautious lover, "it is not for me to affirm or deny the fact; but all that you can wish to ascertain is that I am your prisoner, and here I am. What more can you desire?"

"My prisoner, Zohrab?" said she, with a softened tone, "how can you be my prisoner? Am I not thine? Are we not affianced man and wife? Am I not thy humblest slave?"

"The Shah has shown a great deal of condescension towards me," said Zohrab, in an embarrassed manner, "and has wished

to bestow upon me the hand of the most celebrated woman in his court; but such a reward is totally unmerited by me, and I am altogether unworthy of such a benefit."

"What words are these?" said Zulma; "there is no turning back from what has been decreed. A man like Zohrab Khan is not to retreat from his word."

"What word!" said our hero, with scorn on his lip. "What word have I ever given that I have not kept?"

"You are my affianced husband," said Zulma, the colour rising quickly into her face. "You have therefore given me your word; and can you retract it?"

"Hear me, lady," said Zohrab, with great composure, at the same time distance of manner; "I never gave my word that I would be your husband. It has been the business of those whose interest it was that it should be so, to spread such a report, but I have never been a party concerned, and let me now no longer allow you to be deceived. I never can be your husband—and more—I never will be your husband."

The sudden appearance of brilliant flame in a dark night on the summit of a volcano—the angry foam boiling on the surface of the sea by a squall, would but ill convey an idea of the wrath which at once mantled into the countenance of Zulma, when she heard these words. Love kept her violence in check, but suspicious jealousy impelled it on—she would have stabbed at the same time that she would have pressed him to her heart. Words could scarcely find utterance through her choking throat, but when they did, they came forth with the rapidity of a torrent.

"And is it thus? And have I fallen so low? Am I to be rejected, to be spurned at, by one whose life I have saved at the expense of my own honour? Where am I?—do I dream?—Is it not said or sung in every corner of the street, that Zulma and Zohrab are man and wife? and am I now to be told that I am a liar? that it is not so? What words are these? What fire is in my brain? What ashes have fallen on my head? If I, who am that Zulma who make the men of Tehran kiss the dust of my slippers; whose very name causes the heart to quake, and whose eye inflames hearts—am I to be rejected? Heaven forbid! Be Allah my witness, this grief I will not devour alone—shame shall not fall upon me alone! Zohrab, thou who callest thyself a man, canst thou see this, and not repine at thy hated words? Not my

husband? In the name of Allah, and why not? What have I done? Have I not loved thee as woman never loved?—have I not called upon thee night and morning?—have I not sat on yonder terrace to catch a glimpse of thee, until the sun scorched my temples, and until the dews of the night ate into the marrow of my bones? And am I to be told, that I am nothing to thee? O Allah, great and good! O holy prophet! help to thy poor slave! What have I done that this heavy misery should await me! I rejected! I!—am I Zulma, or am I some wretch worthy of hate? Wherefore behave thus to me?—let me entreat thee!—Here the impassioned maiden raised her eyes and her hands towards the embarrassed youth, and would have clasped his knees; but he stepped forward to prevent her; and, affected by this act of humility, he said as many soothing and consolatory things as the exigency of the moment required, but still kept himself from uttering one word which might give a hope of relenting.

During the whole of this scene, Zohrab's patience and good-nature were put to a severe trial, and often, had it been in his power, during its course, would he have fled, rather than have submitted himself to it. Disgust at Zulma's conduct, at this exhibition of violent and unrestrained passion, excited his principal feeling, nor did one single word which she uttered, or one look which she cast upon him, produce the smallest effect in the manner which she hoped. All her animation was met by coldness, to her impassioned words he scarcely gave an answer, and from the fire of her eye he turned away with indifference. He had hoped that having exhausted herself in the above described rhapsody she would have left him; but no, he was destined still to witness another explosion. All her tenderness now turned to anger.

“I hate you! I abhor your very sight! leave me! odious monster! go—keep your hated looks to yourself; but I will not live unrevenged. I am not to be despised—insulting and pitiful wretch!—Zulma is somebody here—she has a power which will bring you to the dust of her feet; there you shall grovel and entreat, but she shall—will despise you.”

She continued to rant in this manner until she had wound herself up to phrenzy, the cool indifference of Zohrab increasing her violence to a pitch which would have expended itself in

some act of assault, had she had means or weapons at hand. At length, as if of a sudden she had been struck by some impelling thought, she threw on her veil, and rushed out of the room with a quick step through the passages of the house, and soon she found herself hurrying forward through the streets she scarcely knew whither. Again she stopped; and then, more collected, she determined as a last resource to seek the dwelling of the dervish, whose name and doings were now the theme of the whole city, and submit her case to his opinion.

Having passed with a rapid step through the various streets of the city which led to his dwelling, at length she reached its humble entrance and at once made her way to his presence. She found him preparing a still greater quantity of rope than he usually wore round his girdle, and twisting it in various odd knots, with a peculiarly wild and mysterious air. His whole appearance inspired the maiden with awe; and at once she found herself deprived of those feelings, almost amounting to madness, which had impelled her to seek him.

He scarcely took his eyes from his work, when she came in, whilst she stood half advancing, half retreating at the threshold of his den.

At length with a scowling glance darting from beneath his over-hanging brow, he said, "Who is that daughter of violence that thus unasked-for entereth a dervish's dwelling? His ways are peaceful. He abhors the wicked."

"As you are a man of God, O dervish!" said Zulma, with a supplicating accent, "have pity upon a poor wretch, who in this world has nought to support her misery except it may be in your advice."

"Speak," said he, "what would ye? Our ears are open to the afflicted—but woe to the wicked!"

"What can I say?" said Zulma; "I want your assistance to restore to me that which I have lost. I have been deprived of my only happiness."

"Before we converse," said the dervish, "tell me one thing. Are you one of those who see things as they are, or do you see them through one small crack in your understanding, which makes them look all awry, which makes small things look large, and large little—which makes you call happiness what is in truth misery—and which, without considering the feelings of

others, makes you look to your own gratification, and your own whims, as the only one unvarying object."

"*Wahi! Wahi!*" exclaimed the maiden in piteous accent, "I am a woman, and nothing but a woman. I love with a woman's love, and hate with a woman's hate. When I want a thing, I want it violently, immediately, without delay. What I want now must be instant—you must help me—I can take no refusal."

"Speak then," said the dervish, looking at her with a slow and scrutinizing glance; "if I can be of use, upon my eyes be it! but beware that you expect too much from me."

"Although you are a dervish yet still you are a man, and must have man's feelings. You must know too what a woman's feelings are—when all at once she is bereft of what she most desires. I will not detain you by a long story; the long and short is, I have loved; and to my full conviction was beloved in return. I still love, but am not loved in return. I want to bring back that love, and 'tis from you I require a spell to produce that effect—do not say nay—quick, quick—give me the aid of your utmost wisdom, and you will not find Zulma ungrateful." Here," said she, tearing off a magnificent armlet, and almost strangling herself to undo her necklace, "here is only an earnest of what she will give."

"Keep your ornaments, woman!" said the unmoved dervish; "we seek poverty as our greatest happiness. Possessions corrupt the heart, and are inconvenient to the body. If thou canst add a *ghez* to this rope, then indeed thou wilt confer a favour, but as for thy gold and thy trinkets, throw them, to thy pitiful, light balanced sex."

"But say, as you love the prophet! as you hope for a seat in the seventh heaven! say that you will assist me," said she; "come now, wait not, now, follow me!"

"Hold!" said the dervish. "Are ye mad? Think ye that a man's mind will change as easily as thine? Will the wind change a minute the sooner because thou pointest to where thou wishest it to blow from? I have my spells, and can ordain a charm; but there are times and places for all things." Then throwing the greatest possible seriousness into his features, and approaching close to the impatient maiden, he said, "Canst thou encounter black midnight, and not fear? When the jackal

is afoot, when the dog at his carcass howls, and when the murderer speeds his blow, canst thou meet me—me, the dervish, with this single rope for his defence, and, like a thief lurking for plunder, steal me unknown into the chamber of your faithless man. If thou canst not, speak no more, and go."

The awe-struck maiden trembled with fear at these words, but recollecting herself at length, she said, "Yes, oh yes, I can! I can do all that, and more. You shall enter his door; I will watch; and, if it were necessary, I will lay down my life in the attempt. I must have his love, or I die."

"Well then," said the dervish, "'tis to thee I leave the performance of this. When I am thus brought face to face with him, leave the rest to me. Thy courage and fidelity will have their reward. At midnight we meet here; not a minute sooner, not a minute later—begone." Upon which he again turned himself to knotting his rope, and mumbling low spoken words to himself.

Zulma, slowly retreating from his cell, turned the words of the dervish in her mind, and became perplexed at their strange and mysterious import. "What can he mean?" said she; "can he be full of wicked intent, murder perhaps; and does he wish to make me an accomplice in his guilt? Will he strangle my Zohrab? Woe is me, what can this mean?" Still she recollect ed the extraordinary reputation which he had acquired; the astonishing results which had proceeded from his interference; and that, happen what might, she would always be in her father's house, where she could be within call of help at a moment's notice. Having at length reached her own chamber, she reflected that it would be wise to have recourse to the humpback in this emergency, whose advice she had always found highly beneficial, and who would not fail to help her with his counsel. Accordingly she sent for him, and though the hour had already passed when people usually retired to rest, still she found no difficulty in bringing him instantly to her call.

"What has happened, O my Khanum?" said he, as soon as he appeared. "The fowls of the air have roosted, prayers have long since been made, we also were going to rest, but you alone are on the watch."

"Hear me!" said Zulma, "there must be no rest for either of us to-night. I must tell you all that has happened to me this

evening. I was seated on the terrace looking towards the apartment of the hostage ; there was no stir in it whatever ; it appeared to me as if he were absent. You know, one can but partially see the tower from where I was seated, and therefore it is impossible for me to speak with certainty as to what I saw, but, strange to say, I think in the dark I could discern something floating in the air, and descending with rapidity as if from the tower. Conceive my astonishment, and,—shall I acknowledge it?—my impatience, my rage, my jealousy. I immediately went to him, and, to my confusion, there I found him totally unmoved as if nothing had happened, professing ignorance of what I myself had seen with my own eyes, and rebutting all my suspicions with derision, Shall I also tell you that I found his soul turned upside down against me ? He himself told me that he would not marry me. He rejected me with scorn. He treated me like the dirt on his slippers, and would have shaken me off with the same facility that he would them; but you know me ; what more can I say?"

The humpback, who did know her, and well, finding that she was beginning to lose her reason, and to rave, gradually stopped the incipient passion, and led her to relate all she had done in securing the dervish's interference. When she related the manner and the hour in which he was to be introduced to the hostage, the barber lent his whole attention, and his suspicious mind thought he could discover some latent plot. He therefore agreed with Zulma that it would be unwise to leave him entirely unobserved, and it was determined between them that he, the humpback, after Zulma had led the dervish to the door of Zohrab's apartment, should place himself in such a position as to observe what might take place.

Upon this they parted, and midnight being at hand, the impatient maiden, wrapping herself in the ample folds of her darkest veil, took her way to the dervish's cell. Ere she reached it, her ears were struck by sounds which indicated any thing but secrecy or precaution. She found him seated on his leopard's skin on an open spot near his habitation, shouting out ever and anon, in loud though melancholy tones, the sacred *Hou, Hou!* varied by *Allah, ho Ahbar! Allah ho Allah, hou!* and intermixed by an occasional blast of his dolorous sounding horn, which awoke all the sympathies of every neighbouring

dog, who howling their sad and ominous responses, excited those of more distant dogs, by which there might be heard in every part of the still city one long and continual concert of howlings and moanings.

As soon as he perceived Zulma's approach, he arose, threw his leopard's skin over his shoulder, and without saying a word, strided forwards towards the house of the chief executioner, followed by his companion. There was a dim ray of a waning moon which shone upon them as they passed along the silent and desolated streets, sufficiently strong to light up his wild and singularly arrayed person. He had swelled the circumference of his girdle to an immense size by a large addition to the folds of his mysterious rope; over this floated his leopard's skin, whilst his heavy spear rested on his shoulder. When they approached the gate of the Ark he stopped short, and coming close to the maiden, said to her—"Upon your head be it if I am stopped—say we come on a business of life and death." As they approached the guard stationed at the wicket, Zulma, whose person and character were well known to every body, received a ready admittance as she had before been allowed an exit, and when it was seen by whom she was accompanied, still less was any doubt created that all was right. They passed on freely, and without let or hindrance entered her father's house, when instead of taking her path to her own part of the house, she stepped a little out of her way to show the dervish the entrance to Zohrab's apartment. Having ascertained that, he again stopped, and in a low though most serious toned whisper said—"Well, thou hast done thy part; but, mark me!—if I am interrupted in the least, either directly or indirectly, by noise, peepings, or any other symptom of impertinent curiosity, until the very first rays of the sun break forth and strike the turrets of the Ark, the charm is broken—it becomes of no effect, and Allah best knows the consequences which may ensue! for I do not." These words sunk deep into the maiden's heart, for she had just planned in her mind where she could best place herself to watch the progress of the spell which he was about to perform. Now, however, she shrunk into herself, and would have willingly given one of her eyes to prevent the humpback from prying; but it was too late—it would be impossible to find him.

She therefore in silence retreated to her own room, there to await the dawn and the results of that upon which was to depend her future happiness or misery.

CHAPTER XXL

"All the rope may be my death, yet 'tis life to me now."*

ROBBEA'S SOLILOQUY.

ZOHARB was in a profound sleep;—the image of his lovely Amira was occasionally passing in secret visions through his mind. Every delight which the waywardness of a dream could invent was playing through the mazes of his scarcely animate brain, when of a sudden the words "Zohrab! Zohrab!" uttered in a low but most distinct manner, struck his ear. At first they seemed to him to be part of his dream, and as the voice which uttered them, kind and soothing, was familiar to him, he blessed the vision as it spoke, for it reminded him of the voice of his father. Again the sounds struck his ear—louder and still louder. He now, half awake, raised his head from his pillow, and lent a sort of incredulous ear, as if to ascertain that all was still. "Zohrab! Zohrab!" again was said, but in a manner that could not be mistaken. The perplexed, half alarmed, half enraptured youth, answered almost involuntarily—"Oh! my father!—here am I."

"Zohrab," said the voice, "Arise—let us be gone—thy exile is over—Asterabad is already before us."

"Oh, Allah!" answered the youth, now entirely self-possessed, "who and what are you?"

"I am thy father," said the voice; "follow—there is death in delay."

"But where, where are you? let me embrace your knees; let thy son claim a father's blessing." The door of his apartment, as well as the window, letting in a ray of the moon,

whose light was just vanishing, sufficiently lighted up the figure of him who was addressing him, and there, in the person of the Dervish Hezzarpicheh, he indeed saw his father. Dressed and metamorphosed as he was, it was impossible even for a son to have discovered his parent; but the voice, thrilling through every nerve, and giving fresh life and vigour to his whole being, could not be mistaken. He quickly arose, and threw himself rapturously upon his father's bosom, who, though steadily pursuing his long-planned and hitherto successful scheme, could not repress his paternal feelings, and that one moment of a father's tenderness obliterated the thousand anxieties of many long and tedious days.

"Ask nothing new," said Zaul Khan; "be active, and let us be gone."

In an instant Zohrab put on his *caba*, girded on his sword, and thrust his *khanjar* or poignard into his girdle; but during the time of his hasty toilet, something hard fell to the ground, which at that moment he heeded not. This short delay had, however, turned his mind to the one, the all-engrossing thought of his mind,—and Amima's image, in all her loveliness, stood before his bright imagination. He stopt and hesitated.

"Zohrab," said his father, "come!"

"Ah, Sir!" said he, "I know not what I do."

"What!" said Zaul, with impatience in his tone; "what say'st thou?"

"Thy son is not worthy of thee," said Zohrab.

"Ah!" said the father, "and wherefore?"

"The princess—Amima," said Zohrab, in a faltering and supplicating tone; "how can I go?"

"I see," said Zaul Khan, in a voice of anger and resolution; "I see, thou art enslaved by a woman. Now give ear; I who am thy father speak to thee; I, who have lived a life of danger and anxiety all to come to this moment, address thee; if thou wilt witness his destruction, that of thy family and friends, the enslaving of thy country,—stay—stay with thy woman; put on her silken vests, and paint thy cheeks; but if thou art still that Zohrab I have known thee, the pride of my heart, the glory of our country, then hasten without delay—a single thought more is death."

Zohrab, with his senses almost in abeyance, with nerves un-

strung, irresolute and weak from tenderness of soul and violence of love, at hearing these words, seemed at once to throw off the passing frailty of his nature, and seizing his father's hand, as if he had made a desperate wrench of every affection, exclaimed, "My father, I am yours to life or death—lead on."

Zaul instantly darted from the room: but with all his suspicions awake, as he was about ascending the terrace steps he thought he saw a form crouched in a corner of the narrow passage: he sprang upon it, and there indeed he found a human being, who, taking advantage of a deeply shaded nook, was cowering down in deep attention to what was passing.

Seizing him by the throat, he said, "Who are you? Speak, or you die!"

Zohrab instantly put his hand forward, and feeling a protuberance on the back, immediately recognised the humpback. "Tis the Goozoo!" he exclaimed.

The humpback, finding himself discovered, without uttering a word, rose to escape, but Zaul, who seemed to have been prepared for every emergency, as quick as thought seized upon his victim, unrolled the shawl from his waist, secured his whole person by the inextricable folds of the camel tie, and then, with a firm and inexorable hand, forced a handkerchief into his mouth, so strongly that no gag ever more completely commanded silence. He then thrust him into the deserted apartment of his son, and closely followed by Zohrab, immediately ascended the terrace. Having ascertained beforehand what road to take, they scaled the first wall, hastily glided over an adjacent terrace of the chief executioner's house, which was situated close under the city walls, and throwing themselves into a deep shade, they took a survey of the nearest watch towers, in order to discover what sentries might be on the alert. The moon by this time had entirely disappeared behind the lofty Albors; dead stillness reigned throughout the city. "We will wait for the next challenge from the sentries, and then descend," said Zaul Khan. They perceived that within ten yards of the place where they stood, was planted one of the three pieces of artillery which served to guard the citadel, and Zaul, perceiving that the parapet threw a deep shadow inwardly, immediately crept close to it, followed by his son, until they came to where the gun threw a still darker shade. All at once they

heard from the adjacent tower the cry of "*hazir*," which was echoed and repeated from one tower to the other quite round the battlements. Zaul then said, in the lowest whisper, "be now ready—all depends upon this moment." He then unloosed one end of the long rope that was wound round his body, and lashed it firmly to the gun carriage, then having waited a certain time to allow the cries of the sentries to subside; "Now, wretches! sleep on," exclaimed he; "ye think ye have done your duty, with your drowsy *hazir* thrown from your throat—but Zohrab is ours—*Allah, Allah*, protect us!"

Upon that they both crept through the mouth of the embrasure, and lowering the rope down the side of the fortification, they found that nothing could be more just to its measure than its length to the height of the wall. Zaul made his son proceed the first, who with cautious step, hand under hand, gradually descended into the very depths of the dry ditch, and landed in safety; he followed, and finding themselves at the bottom, in safety and at liberty, by mutual impulse they threw themselves into each other's arms, and again and again thanked heaven for their safe deliverance.

It was at this moment that Zohrab, putting his hand to his arm to feel whether the armlet, that sacred gift of his beloved Amima, was safe, found it not there. A deadly apprehension overcame him as he felt over his person, but—he found it not: his agitation was immediately remarked by his father, who said, "What has happened?—speak." "Oh," said the grief-struck youth, "it is lost; let me return,—she dies if it be found!" —he was so overpowered by this thought that he trembled from head to foot, and so entirely unmanned was he, that it was with difficulty he could support himself. "Whatever it is," said the inexorable father, "lost it must be—to return is impossible—let us on!"

"My father," exclaimed the youth, "did you but know all, you would pity and help me."

"I do know all," said the Khan, "I would help you—but it is too late—we cannot return—be yourself, my son!"

"I would give up any thing; but, oh! what will become of her?"

"Zohrab," said his father, "again I say come on, this is not worthy of you." Then with difficulty at length he persuaded

the reluctant youth to advance, who finding that it was now impossible to return, allowed himself to be carried onwards by his father's impetuosity.

To escape from the depths of the ditch, which was broken and rugged, and easy of access in many parts, was the business of a few minutes, and when once fairly landed on the plain, the father proceeded with a quick step through the cultivated fields, until they reached a certain tree, where to Zohrab's surprise they found a man awaiting them with three horses. Without a moment's delay they mounted, and were soon in rapid motion on the high road to Mazanderan. Zohrab in other circumstances would have been frantic with joy at finding himself once again on a saddle, but the loss of his armlet, which compromised the safety of Amima, in case it should be found in his apartment, depressed his spirits, and bore down his mind with the most dismal forebodings. His father said but little, and hurried anxiously onwards, keeping the road during the darkness of night, but striking into the untrodden country as the morning dawned. They travelled without drawing bridle until the close of the succeeding day, when having passed Firouzkoh, and the well-known passes of the *Teng Shemshir-bûr*, they struck into one of the deep dells, which lead into the forests of Mazanderan.

During their passage through scenes so well known and so deeply impressed upon the mind of Zohrab as those of Firouzkoh, and its neighbourhood, what else could occupy his mind but the recollections of her whose image was identified with his captivity, and the recent events of his life? He was riding onwards, entirely absorbed in his own thoughts, the horses of the whole party jaded by extreme fatigue, when their ears were struck with distant shouting. Zaul's face, and that of their attendant (the groom who had conducted the horses) lighted up with joy as they caught the sound. "Did you hear," said the Khan, as he turned his ear to catch the distant shout, "did you hear that, Reza Kûli?"

"Yes," said Reza Kûli, "I heard. It must be they; *khoda shukur!* God be praised!"

"Can you see any thing? In God's name, look well," said the Khan.

Reza Kûli's eyes, like those of a lynx, were not slow in their

search, and at length he said, after some hesitation, "Yes, I think I see a horseman on the brow of yon hill."

"I see him too," said Zaul, "let us on, it is one of their scouts." Shortly after they heard the report of a musket, "There they are in truth—'tis well—our luck is on the rise! Praise be to Allah, we have now nothing more to apprehend, ride on."

Pushing through a tract of thick brushwood, they made their way to some lofty trees, the first of those which fringe the great forest belt that girds the province of Asterabad. Little by little they perceived indications of a bivouac. First the stragglers appeared, then a thin blue smoke was seen issuing through the trees; and at length they came upon a collection of some thirty or forty persons, who, as if by one common consent, left their occupations and came to meet them. Some had been tending horses, others lighting fires, others seeking repose, but all now rushed forwards in joy. The first person whom Zohrab recognized was his uncle Mustafa, who threw himself into his arms with unaffected transport; then came the two Turcoman chiefs, who though less refined in the testimony of their satisfaction, could not rest until they had given him their warmest embrace. Every one seemed more occupied with him than with his father, who partook of the general joy quite as much as if he had taken no part in obtaining his release. Zohrab was affected to tears to find himself so suddenly surrounded by those so dear to him. Could he have banished from his mind all apprehensions concerning the fate of his mistress, he would have been supremely happy. Every individual present, after his own relatives and the Turcoman chiefs, came in succession to kiss his hand; he knew most of them by name, and they recollect him as a child. Some had almost seen him born, others younger had been his playfellows, and not even the meanest stable hind was there, who in some manner or other was not known to him. There they stood, the whole party backed by the thick forest scenery, in a rugged and picturesque group, feasting their eyes upon him, while scarcely any other words escaped their lips, than "*Ma-shallah! shukur Allah*, praise to Allah!" with variations of "God grant him protection. We are grateful. Blessings be

on the prophet and the Imans!" and other such like exclamations.

After their raptures had in some measure subsided, their attention then turned towards the extraordinary man who had so ably planned and judiciously executed his son's escape. Standing in the group, still preserving his wild and grotesque costume of the dervish, although now unencumbered by the mysterious coil, he inspired awe in those who beheld him. Accustomed as they had been in the city to identify him with the character which he had assumed, they had almost forgotten that he was in fact their chief and their governor, but seeing him now in his true situation, the costume he wore served only as a memorial to remind them of what he had gone through, and of his great merit in the success which had attended his scheme. They approached him with the greatest reverence, the meaner kissing the hem of his garment, whilst the chiefs received his cordial salutation.

Horse cloths having been spread at the foot of one of the largest trees, the whole party adjourned thither to sit and take refreshment.

The first among them who broke silence was one of the old Turcoman chiefs, Deveh Aga, or the Camel Lord.

"Praise be to Allah," said he to Zaul Khan, "you have done great things. May your house always be in plenty!"

"By the beard of Omar," said the Blind Lion, "such another man in the world does not exist. We have done the needful on the Shah's father's grave!" at the same time he broke out into a chuckling growl, which was caught up and re-echoed by all the by-standing group.

"*Mashallah, mashallah!* praise be to God!" said Mustafa Khan, emphatically raising his eyes to heaven, and placing the back of his hand with the palms upwards on his knees, "we have got our Zohrab again. What have we not undergone! what anxiety have we not felt since that unlucky day when the poor hound breathed his last, to the present joyful meeting! Who would have thought when ruin threatened our home, when our country was about to be visited by the despotism of the tyrant, and when our friends would have been deprived of their independence, that all at once we should thus again be united,

firmer and more resolute than ever to oppose the destroyer, and blessed by the presence of him whom we thought lost to us for ever! And, under Allah and the Prophet, who has done this for us? See, see, O my friends!" pointing to Zaul Khan, "here is the man—this man wiser than Locman, stronger than Rustam, more generous than Nushirvan—he has conferred these benefits upon us."

"*Belli, belli!*" was heard from every mouth. And "God grant him life—may the Prophet protect him—may his son be like him!" and many such phrases were poured in sincerity into the gratified ears of the adventurous Khan.

"What words are these," said Zaul Khan; "I of myself am nought;—give your thanks to that Being from whom all blessings flow. Whatever we have done is the business of fate. We left Asterabad at a lucky hour, and at a fortunate hour we are returned. Our son has been restored to us, what more can we want? In future all our thoughts and endeavours must be directed towards defending ourselves against the Shah, who, enraged as he will be at having been completely foiled, will not fail to attack us as soon as he gathers his forces together."

"Let him come," said the Blind Lion; "we will bring the whole of the Tekiah in a body against him."

"He shall find death behind every tree in Mazanderan," said the Camel Lord.

Zohrab, who during this conversation had stood before his father (a custom so grounded in Persian manners that nothing can uproot it), expressed a hope that he might be told how his extraordinary deliverance had been brought about. To this moment he avowed himself ignorant of every thing; for during the hurry and anxiety of their escape, he could not call upon his father to make explanations. The plan pursued seemed to him so difficult, that excepting by miracle he did not conceive how it could have proved so successful. This request was confirmed both by the looks and wishes of those present, and they would willingly have postponed taking the rest they so much required, if Zaul, who never allowed himself to be surprised into an imprudent act, had not reminded them that they were not yet in safety, and could not call themselves so until they were within the walls of Asterabad; for he maintained that they might still

be overtaken by the Shah's horse. All he could allow them to enjoy at present was a short repose, promising, as soon as they had reached their homes, to relate the long narrative of his adventures.

To this they consented, and having placed the proper guards the remainder of the party were soon entranced in sleep. Long before the dawn, the indefatigable Zaul roused his companions, and again they were on their road through the sloping forests, which in rapid and dangerous descents led them from the elevated table land of Irak into the low plains and jungles which gird the Caspian Sea, and render Mazanderan a country so difficult of access.

At length, having descended the rocky defiles of the shaggy Sanduk, gradually they wound into better paths, until at length they reached the causeway, one of the works of the great Shah Abbas, which kept at a distance the encroachments of the exuberant and rank vegetation.

Zaul Khan, finding that they were now scarcely more than a few hours' distance from their city, called a halt, and proposed that some one should ride forward to announce their arrival. Every one seemed ready to start on so grateful a service, but none so intensely expressed his desire as Zohrab, to whom every path, and even every tree in the country, were as well known as the faces of his dearest friends. Although his father and friends would have been proud to exhibit him to the inhabitants as they flocked out to meet them, yet so strongly did the desire to embrace his mother show itself, although unexpressed, that at length he was permitted to proceed.

"It is better that it should be so," said Mustafa Khan; "let him see his mother first, and then he will be better able to attend the *mejlis*, the assembly, afterwards."

The overjoyed youth impelled his horse forwards, and threading his way along the nearest paths, soon found himself within sight of his native place. The intense longing which filled his breast to embrace his mother and to see his home, now absorbed every other feeling, and even the image of his beloved Anima was for a time obliterated.

It was towards the close of day that he reached the city gate, which, although it was now allowed to remain open during the

day, still was not left unguarded and unwatched. The same old soldier who, as our reader may recollect, had recognized from the wall the faithful hound Hemdum, was seated at the entrance of the drawbridge, and as he observed the approach of a stranger apparently in important haste, he arose and retreated towards the gate itself. But his attention was too much attracted by the horseman's appearance to allow him to think of any thing else. His well-trained eye, accustomed to a quick scrutiny of every object requiring watchfulness, at once recognized the well-known form of his young lord. He put up his hands, put them down—would have run forwards, then turned about and came back again; his utterance was stopped, his senses seemed bewildered at the apparition, until Zohrab had approached so near that all he could do was to stand stiff in his place, and open his eyes with a half idiotic, half sensible smile.

“*Ahi, Osman, my uncle!*” cried out the enraptured youth; “is it you?—don't you know me?”

Again he spoke, before the old man could be roused from his astonishment, when running forwards, he seized his young master's hand, and kissing it over and over again, exclaimed, “*shukuir Khoda!* thanks to God! in truth it is he. Heaven has blessed my eyes once more with your presence. Your place has long been empty; let me run to the palace.” He then would have preceded him to give the news to the city; but Zohrab, who like his poor faithful dog was almost ready to drop from fatigue, would not allow himself to be outstripped, and impelling his tottering horse into his last gallop, reached the gate of his father's house before he could be announced.

The old porter was acted upon nearly in the same manner as the old soldier had been, by the sudden apparition of his young master; his bent back almost turned straight, and his withered eye shot a bright ray, as he saw him dart by, and all he could utter was “*Allah ho acbar, God is great!*” Zohrab had just time to call to him by name, and rushed onwards to the well-known gates of the harem. His heart beat with a redoubled action as he paused at the threshold, so near to that spot which had witnessed his first entrance into life, and which was endeared to him by every tie and every recollection. He was so affected by the anticipation of all that he was about to witness, that he could scarcely find resolution to proceed. He

would have continued in this state of indecision, until perceiving the old porter hobbling towards him with officious affection, he at once drew back the curtain and entered.

CHAPTER XXII.

"There is no virtue in loving a moon face, but the blessings of Allah be upon him who reveres a grey head."

SAADI.

The scene which presented itself to Zohrab upon his drawing back the curtain was this. In the principal room, opposite to him, with the heavy casements open, was seated his mother conversing with two of her neighbours; on the outside stood a black slave in attendance. In one corner of the court was a servant pounding tobacco. In another were two maidens spinning. The uplifting of the curtain of the harem being no uncommon occurrence, excited no attention, and it was not until Zohrab was fairly in the centre of the court that his presence was perceived, when those of the women who first caught sight of him seeing it was a man, uttered a loud shriek, which roused the attention of the rest. It was then that Zohrab's mother, at the first glance, recognized her son, and, forgetting veil, slippers, and acts of courtesy to her guests, almost at one bound she found herself fast locked in his embrace. It would be doing but little justice to the warmth of eastern feelings to attempt their description by words. The uplifted hands, the bursts of exclamation, the reiterated expression of thanks to God, the ardent looks of love reciprocated between the parent and the child; the expressive silence, and again a return to vociferous joy, are all too varied, too quick in their transitions, to be given by words. The feelings which arose between Zohrab and his mother may be conceived in some measure from the former parts of our narrative; and it was long before their first emotions could sufficiently subside to allow the youth to give an account of his own

adventures, and of those of his father and the deputation. It required a long time for him to meet the inquiries of every individual which composed the establishment; he was almost as much the child of the older servants as he was that of his own parents; the whole city was soon acquainted with the joyful tidings, and from all quarters the inhabitants flocked to get a glimpse of their lost young favourite.

The first act of his mother, after her joy and astonishment were a little abated, was to spread her praying carpet, and return thanks to God for the blessing conferred upon her. Her son was not backward in following her example. Although his past life had been so full of adventure, yet the moment he reached the paternal roof he seemed at the same time to return to every habit which was common to it, among which that of a constant reference to the all-wise Providence of heaven was the principal.

Zohrab had scarcely had time to give a short outline of his captivity, and of the circumstances attending its course and its termination, to his mother, ere her feelings of tenderness were again roused by the arrival of her husband, and then, indeed, with their son before them, did they heartily reiterate their thanks to God, for his restoration.

The city by this event at once assumed a new aspect. Instead of the abandoned and desolate appearance which it had acquired by the absence of its governor, activity and bustle were infused into its inhabitants. Immediate steps were taken to place it in the best posture of defence. A message was despatched to the encampment of the Turcomans upon the plains of Kipchâk, in order to call in a strong detachment of men to garrison the walls, in conjunction with the people of Asterabad. Guards were placed at each gate, and every thing resumed its former warlike and rebellious aspect. Zaul Khan, during his rapid journey from Tehran, had planned a scheme of defence for his city and its territory, the details of which were so familiar to his mind, that without delay he gave his orders for their execution. He knew every pass through the mountains and through the intricate jungles, with all the intimacy of one of its own wild animals, and there he laid his picquets and planned his ambushes. He ordered the city walls and gates to be examined and repaired. The Turcoman chiefs sent to their different camps with

directions that every provision in corn and rice should immediately be despatched to the city ; as many animals as were superfluous were ordered to the plains, and nothing was left undone to meet that attack which it was likely would immediately be undertaken by the Shah.

Zaul Khan, on the day of his arrival, gave a *ziaset*, an entertainment, to all the principal people of the city, as well as to those who had formed the deputation. He exhibited few of the luxuries of the capital ; his life was very much like that of his allies, the Turcomans, living in tents and possessors of cattle ; but what was wanting in delicacy was made up in abundance. After it was over, and the guests had washed their hands and smoked their first *kalioun*, he expressed his readiness to gratify the curiosity of the *mejlis*, by a relation of his adventures since he had left the city.

Every one present was delighted, and none more so than his son, who stood at a respectful distance, until his father ordered him to be seated, which after some hesitation he obeyed, but at the outermost place and on the very margin of the nummud.

The Khan then began as follows :—

“ It will be recollected that on the day of the departure of the deputation from Asterabad, the aspect of the stars was most favourable, and that the astrologers asserted that no enterprize was ever commenced under better auspices. We left the gate precisely at the appointed minute, and let us all allow that, by the blessings of Allah and his holy Prophet ! nothing has ever so completely and entirely succeeded ; therefore do not suppose that what I am about to relate of myself is said in self-commendation, for I attribute all to the direction of a higher Power, and therefore I can claim no merit to myself. I will say with Ferdusi, ‘ O God, whatever I am ’tis thou that hast made me !’ ”

“ You will remember that when I left you at Toweh under the pretext of illness, I did so in order that the change in my person which I had contemplated might be known to as few persons as possible. It was known only to Mustafa Khan and two others. As soon as the deputation had proceeded on its road, my first operation was to shave off my beard, that beard which you all so well remember, and the loss of which I deplored as much as if I had been abandoned by my most intimate friend. This has been the sacrifice which I have most felt since my de-

parture, and I could never have thought that the cutting off a few useless hairs would have cost me such sincere regret. I felt like one deprived of a limb; it was my resource under all circumstances:—if pleased, I stroked it; in anger, I pulled it hard; in heat, it refreshed me; in cold, it kept me warm. But I need not speak of the loves between me and my beard, for all you who possess them no doubt feel the same tenderness towards your own!"

Upon this there was a general stroking of beards throughout the assembly, the two Turcoman chiefs excepted, who could only make play with the four or five bristles which nature had given them at the end of their bony chins.

"I had allowed the hair of my head to grow untouched; it had acquired some length already," continued the Khan, "and I encouraged it to hang over my face; those shaggy eyebrows for which I was famous, I also shaved off; and so otherwise did I fashion my features, that I leave it to those who knew me best, to say whether, with the addition of my dervish's garb, my disguise was not complete. It was night when I rejoined the party at the *Teng shemshir bûr*, and when I tried my assumed voice upon almost every individual of the cavalcade, I was happy to find that no one could recognize the tones of Zaul Khan. In short, no scheme of concealment ever succeeded better, and so far I was well pleased with my essay.

"Having reached Tehran I took up my quarters near the embassy, and soon succeeded in making myself known throughout the city. I frequented the bazaars, the maidans, and the mosques, I declared myself to be a complete fakir, a *gûsheh nichin*, a sitter in a corner. My principal doctrine was contempt of life and of the world. I rejected every luxury and coveted every austerity. With the happy application of scraps of poetry, which I appeared to compose impromptu, but which I had arranged at my leisure, I quite took the minds of my hearers by surprise. I was compared to Aflatoon, Socrat, and Locman, by the first mollahs even to my nose; so true is it, that in novelty of any sort either merit or its contrary are exaggerated far beyond their reality. I rejected applications from the Shah to appear before him, and in proportion to the increase of my impudence I rose in the opinion and estimation of the public. In the meanwhile I lost no opportunity of acquiring information upon

every thing which might advance the ultimate object of my scheme. Very soon I became acquainted with the situation and the neighbourhood of Zohrab's place of confinement. I learnt the character of those in whose hands he was placed; every detail of the projected marriage between him and Zulma was made known to me; and I soon formed a proper estimate of the dangers, physical as well as moral, of his position.

"I naturally expected that on the day of the audience which the Shah would give to the deputation, when he found I was not present, that his anger would be roused, and that we might expect the most serious results from it. Consequently I determined to produce myself in my most adventurous act of impudence. Good fortune declared on my side, for on the preceding day I had become acquainted with a Frank mollah, a man who was acquiring great influence in the city, and who by the strange doctrines which he expounded had roused all the *Ulema* against him. The Shah ordered him to his presence, and pleased as kings are with a new toy—let it be a new minister, a new palace, or a new mistress—our tyrant was taken with the shorn chin, the close-cut garments, and the strange appearance of this infidel. Among his accomplishments he professed a knowledge of medicine, and as the Shah is very anxious to shelter his person from harm by every means in his power, he applied to him for talismans and nostrums for that purpose. It appears that this sort of Frank is impressed with the strange belief, that if any man, be he who he may, will but kiss a certain cross, that this act is one of the first steps, so he conceives, towards making a convert to his way of thinking in matters of religion. He therefore made the Shah believe that his cross was a talisman containing within itself the power of preservation from harm, and that if he would wear it next to his heart, and occasionally kiss it, no harm could ever accrue to him and the Frank, moreover, informed me, that on that very day, the Shah had received such a talisman from his hands, and had inserted it within the folds of his caba. I treasured this fact in my mind, as I did every thing which directly or indirectly might bear upon the Shah's character. The details of our first audience and that day's events are too well known for me to repeat, but I must own that when the Shah cast his scrutinizing glances upon my face and person, when he began to doubt my

veracity, and when he talked of requiring a test of it, my heart began to sink within me, and I despaired of success. But as soon as I observed him to put his hand within his vest, and when, with his hand extended, I heard him require to be told what it contained, the whole extent of my good fortune flashed upon me, the Frank mollah's anecdote came to my recollection, and I believe inspiration came to my help. In four lines I told the king, without his being able to misunderstand me, what his hand contained.

"I perceived that my triumph was at once effected; from that moment the Shah placed the greatest confidence in me, although every now and then he gazed on my face with looks of inquiry as if he recognized my features, in a manner far from satisfactory.

"Again my good fortune was favourable, for soon after the Shah consulted me upon the health of his niece the lady Amima. Ever since I had heard of the adventure of Zohrab our son at Sawachi, and had ascertained beyond a doubt that he must have spoken to and seen the face of the Princess, I was convinced that they could not have met without feelings of great interest towards each other, and every thing which I learnt since my arrival at Tehran, confirmed my suspicion. No one could ascertain the cause of her disorder. Previously to my seeing her I visited the Shah's *Hakim Bashi*, or physician in chief, and what he said proved that the seat of her malady was in the mind; for, from all my inquiries, I could not discover that it had affected the body.

"I soon made up my mind how to act. After I had asked her a few preliminary questions, in order to ascertain whether my suspicions were well founded or not, I at length mentioned Zohrab's name, when at the same time I held her hand. The agitation which immediately ensued proved that I was right; and when I taxed her with loving him, the distressing effects which my words produced told me at once the whole story. Before I left her, I determined to ascertain the extent of Zohrab's temptation and danger, in order to judge how much he too might have caught the infection, and as I drew back the curtain which separated us, I saw her face. Old as I am, the sight of so much beauty, so much loveliness, such softness and modesty, had the

effect of enchantment upon me ; what, therefore, must it have been upon the feelings of youth?"

The eyes of the assembly were here turned upon Zohrab, whose serious and averted countenance showed how much he was affected and interested by this part of his father's narrative. He would, indeed, have left the room at this passage of it, had he himself not been too anxious to learn what was in fact of the greatest interest to himself.

His father continued : " I then became convinced of his great danger, and that his confinement as a prisoner and a hostage were but slight miseries compared to the tortures of his unhappy and hopeless passion. I was visited by the Princess's attendant, who, thinking that her mistress might be living under the influence of sorcery, or the evil eye, sought from me a charm to destroy it, and a talisman to secure her from harm. Possessed of the knowledge which I had just acquired, I surprised her by forestalling her before she had said a word upon the nature of her errand, for I had recognized in her attendant one of those who had conducted me to the Princess's appartments on the day of my visit, and thus judged from her appearance who she might be. I wrote the charm, and used it in furtherance of my scheme to destroy the interest which the Princess took in the fate of our son.

" The great object which I now had in view was to obtain an interview with Zohrab himself, and hitherto nothing had happened which gave me the least hope. He was watched with the greatest vigilance. Every hint which I threw out to the Shah of the necessity of releasing the oppressed, and Zohrab in particular, was opposed by a very reasonable answer, namely, the necessity of waiting till the arrival of the chief of the deputation. There was one circumstance, however, from which I expected some opening, and I was not disappointed. I knew the whole extent of the love which the chief executioner's daughter bore to Zohrab, and of her rage and disappointment at being slighted. I was every moment in expectation of being applied to by the despairing maiden to use my powers upon the heart of the cruel youth in her favour; and truly I was not mistaken. I now became so sure that Zohrab's deliverance was near at hand, that I took every precaution in my power to forward it. I got ac-

quainted with the king's *mermerbashi* (architect), and from him I learnt the exact dimension of the walls of the citadel situated close to his apartment. He gave me the height of the wall, and I immediately made more rope, adding to it that which I habitually wore round my girdle, in order to possess a sufficient length by which to secure our escape. It was in the evening after I had returned to my cell, and as I was taken up in plaiting my rope, that a soft step announced a female visiter. The moment she began her narrative I knew who she was, and my measures were soon taken. I now felt that the whole game was in my hands, and I acted accordingly. I sent horses to await us at a certain spot in the plain. I advised Mustafa Khan to get the whole of his party without the city walls, upon various pretences, which might easily be done, considering the liberty which was allowed to them by the Shah ; and having done so, to make the best of his way to the place of rendezvous on the skirt of the forest, which I indicated ; and then, putting up a prayer to heaven for success in this last stage of my enterprise, I boldly met the maiden at the midnight hour which I had appointed.

"Had she been any other but the person she was, so celebrated for her boldness and independence, so privileged to do that which no other Persian maiden would venture to do, the whole of my scheme must have fallen to the ground. She was known and feared by every one. The guards on the watch, the officers of those guards, every person in and out of the royal palace, were acquainted with her person, and obeyed her injunctions tacitly and without hesitation. The only person whom I really dreaded was a certain humpback, the king's barber and spy, the most sharp-sighted and malignant of mortals. His observations were so keen, and his deductions so true, that it required all the prudence and foresight of which I was master to combat them ; and true enough it was ordained that at the very moment when, with the aid of the Prophet, I thought I had overcome every difficulty, and that my triumph was complete, when Zohrab and I were passing over the threshold of danger into the high-road of security, this ill-fated imp was found on our path. We were obliged to use violence towards him, for which I expect every return of which the wicked ingenuity of his mind is capable of devising ; but, *Allah kereem*, God is mer-

ciful! *Alhamdulillah*, God be praised! here we are in safety. What more can I say?"

When Zaul Khan had finished his narration, repeated exclamations of "*Mashallah, shukur Allah*," and "*Alhamdulillah*," were heard to issue from the mouths of the assembly. They were all lavish in their praises of his wisdom, his bravery, and his activity; and well had he earned the satisfaction of having redeemed his son from bondage, and of securing his country against the ill usage of a tyrant's government. The person who was most open-mouthed in his praise was Mirza Shireen Ali, the moonshee, who had not been permitted to leave Asterabad.

"What words can I say?" said he. "In truth I am a Persian and a Shirazi, but I never yet heard of such wisdom in the transactions of life! It is necessary to have been father of all the sages which the history of our country records, to have conceived and executed such an undertaking. Life will leave the head of the king as soon as he hears of the escape of the fortunate Zohrab, our lord and master; and whose dog is he who will venture to come hither again, either in peace or in war? In peace his beard will be laughed at; in war his soul will fly out of his body."

"Is there a doubt about our enemies coming?" said the Camel Lord, shaking his head at the same time. "Before we can have time to seek winter quarters for our black tents, they will be upon us; upon that make your mind easy."

"The rains will burn their fathers," growled out the Blind Lion, "if they cannot come at the fall of the year, and they cannot come sooner. Happen what will, we are ready."

"*Inshallah*," said Mustafa Khan, "we will be ready; but let us not deceive ourselves. If the Shah comes it will be in great strength. If ever our energies are to be called forth, it is now. Every man must be a Rustam, every horse a *Sheb deez*; our preparations must commence this very day, and seeing what has already been achieved by our chief, who is there that will not place unlimited confidence in him? And see, instead of one head, we have two. With such protectors, under Allah, who need despair?"

Zohrab, in the meanwhile, had not said a word; his mind was too much buried in thought, and he had too much respect

for his father and the customs of his country, to offer his advice unasked upon the present position of the affairs of his family and country. He had still much to say to his mother, for whom he entertained a more than filial affection, and he therefore entreated his father's permission to retire. As soon as he was gone, Zaul Khan said, "Our friends must forgive us, if the youth, who has just received our permission to retire, gives not up his heart to our affairs so ardently as we could yet wish. He had a thousand pangs to combat which time alone will assuage. What I have said during the course of my narrative will sufficiently explain what I mean. It is impossible to turn midnight into noonday, except by patience; but let the day come when energy to obstruct a foe is required, and bravery to face danger, and I will forfeit this poor head that our son does not show himself the least backward to meet the approaching storm."

"What words are these, Zaul Khan!" said the Camel Lord; "sorrow must have its course like the mountain torrent; it rages at first, overflowing its banks—it gradually lowers into a moderate stream, and then flows on doing all proper good. Shall we ever forget that youth in the *chappows* of former times. Such a man of the sword has not been seen in Irân since the days when the white devils were to be killed in our forest, and since the slaying of the giant Koulzum."

"With Zohrab at my side," said the Blind Lion, "I care not for a thousand Shahs, and his *zamburek* and cannon to boot. What can they do in this wilderness of wood, where men must go by single files through passes narrower than a camel's mouth, bordered by trees from which guns may be fired as quick as puffs from a *kalion*."

Nothing, indeed, could be better than the spirit which Zaul Khan found to exist among his followers and the people of Asterabad in general. Every one seemed willing cheerfully to make every sacrifice rather than submit to the Shah, and appeared anxious to second any measure of defence which he proposed. Mustafa Khan, who was as keen a politician as his brother, though not endowed with the versatility of his talent, his enterprise, nor strength of character, had, during his stay in the capital, secured by presents and address the friendship and good will of many of the principal men about the court, and

there was every probability that, should the king lead his forces against Asterabad, much advantage might be gained from their interference. Thus fortified in every way, did they set about the work of defence with the greatest alacrity, and in their endeavours to prepare for the Shah's reception we will for the present leave them.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A man's mouth may be too full, as one may have too much of happiness.

TURKISH SAYING.

ZULMA had passed a wakeful night in her own apartment, expecting the dawn, with all the fever and anxiety of a lover awaiting the moment of meeting. Too impatient to stay until the sun was actually risen, she crept without noise to her favourite terrace, in order, if possible, to catch any sound by which she might draw some omen favourable to her passion. The morning was still as death. She lent a quick ear to the hostage's place of confinement—she could perceive no trace of the dervish—but a strange noise struck her ear. It was as that of some one choking, or practising the first act of expectoration, accompanied by some shuffling of feet and struggling. She listened again and again, putting first one ear to the sound then the other, drawing back the long tresses which hung about her face, and at each moment uttering a faint exclamation of surprise.

These sounds rather increased than diminished. "What can have happened?" said she to herself; "can the monster have harmed the youth?" Still, in her superstitious fear of disturbing the operation of the charm, she ventured not to stir, but remained fixed, alternately watching the tinges of the sky and the rising sun, and listening to the uncouth sounds which came from the chamber below. Her mind was gradually working up into a state of apprehension, that through her interference and the

agency of the dervish, she might have been the means of producing some dire mischief, and that the hostage's existence might be at stake. Therefore, losing all patience, she determined at once to clear up her doubts. One great snort, which she heard as she rose to go, quickened her steps, and in the course of a short time she found herself at the door of the mysterious chamber. There lending an attentive ear, all her fears were confirmed. The choaking, grunts, and struggles had increased to a frightful degree, and she could not but conclude that her lover was at his last gasp. She threw open the door, which had been carefully closed, and there, although the curtain over the window was lowered, she discovered, not the beautiful youth of her heart, but the pinioned humpback. Such was the transition from apprehension of evil to the certainty of security, that her first impulse was to break out into immoderate laughter; and, indeed, the object before her was well calculated to excite it. He was rolling about the room, performing feats similar to those which one may have seen a beetle perform on the high road when struggling with a ball. His head, knees, shoulders, and hump seemed all brought together into one knotted mass, bound so ingeniously together that the hands could in no manner perform their office, whilst the feet having been placed from off their perpendicular could no longer be of use as a pedestal. His hideous face was distorted out of all shape, every feature of it being thrown into a wrong place. The mouth was distended in so extraordinary a manner, that it now looked as if it were the orifice of a dirty clothes bag over-filled, whilst the eyes, naturally small at the best, had now almost totally disappeared. What with struggling—what with his efforts to expel the gag, the poor wretch had changed his colour from its own ghastly yellow to a livid purple, and it is probable that had not Zulma come to his rescue, he could not have lived through the day to tell his own tale. Though convulsed almost into hysterics, she ran to him, and with one jerk as she wrenched the horrid rag from his mouth, she had the pleasure to see his jaws come together again with a lively snap. It was then that he began to roar and to draw largely upon his lungs, feeling pleasure in once again putting those vital parts into motion which had almost been suspended. During these preliminaries, she sought for the end of the bandage which was bound round him, and at

length, with the utmost difficulty, succeeded in loosing one hand, and then the other, until at length she released him altogether. From a state of vigorous irritability, the exhausted humpback now lay almost inanimate, uttering ever and anon in low-drawn moans the following words:—"Ahi, they with burnt fathers!—Ahi, those procurers!—Ahi, they with improper mothers! I have defiled their fathers' graves!—Curses be on their sisters' progeny, and on their mothers' too! See what they have done!—they have killed me!—I am a done man! Where can I run to, to drink their blood? Please God, please God, there is still time;—give the *Goozoo* a world to work in and he will find ye out!—Ah, ye wretches, whose fathers are burning in Jehovahnum!"

When he had come to himself, and he could pay attention to his deliverer, he related all that had befallen him. She was persuaded in her own mind that the ill success of the charm was owing to the interference of the humpback, a warning which she had previously received from the dervish, and she was therefore slow in believing the facts which the injured man asserted.

"This was predicted to me," said Zulma; "the dervish assured me if any one interfered the charm would be broken."

"What dervish? what charm?" exclaimed the angry barber; "why will you go so far out of your way to believe such balderdash? He was no more a dervish than I am an angel, and possessed no charm beyond the power of uttering falsehoods of the largest dimensions. Open your eyes, as you love Allah!—you are neither a child nor an ass;—see your error. That ill-born knave was no less a person than Zaul Khan, father to the unsainted Mazanderani boy. They are both fled. Their last act was to bind ill-fated me into one unmanageable lump, and leaving me with a mouthful of rag, and my legs and arms bound tighter than those of a new-born babe, they turned their backs upon the beard of the Shah, and are no doubt ere this half way to Asterabad. But let it be—I am the *Goozoo*. If there is a path for a snake through the woods of Mazanderan, the Shah's army shall find it, and if there be one dog of them alive this day six months—one mother's child of the whole race of Asterabadis—then say that the humpback has a face free to be spit upon by every fool in Persia."

The disappointed and dejected Zulma now gradually began

to undeceive herself, and the illusion in which she had allowed herself to live, dropped from before her understanding like scales from before her eyes.

"And is it so indeed?" said she; "am I awake, or do I still dream? Have I, you, the Shah, the whole city, been really thus deceived? And by whom? by a wretch who, one after the other, has laughed at us, taken us in, reviled us, showed us that we are fools, children in cunning and craft, when compared to himself. *Ahi wah! i!*" said she, "where shall I go? what is to be done?" whilst rage filled her breast, and convulsed her features.

For some time did these two worthies sit opposite to each other, ruminating in silence over the trick which had been put upon themselves and their nation, and lashing themselves up to plan and resolve acts of the most unbounded revenge. They tortured their thoughts to discover who could be their accomplices in the court and city; for to suppose that such a system of deceit could have been carried on without many accessories, were folly, next to an impossibility. As the day advanced and illumined the apartment in which they sate, they cast their eyes about, hoping to find some clew whereby to clear up the mystery of Zohrab's flight; but, saving the books and clothes which he had left behind, they could discover nothing. However, as Zulma rose to go, near the threshold of the door her foot struck against some hard substance. She stooped down, and picking it up, discovered it to be the armlet which Amima had given to Zohrab at their parting, and which had dropped from him as he was leaving his apartment. "See," said she to the humpback, "what I have found! Can this be Zohrab's or his father's? What a beautiful *bazubend*!"

The barber took it into his hand, and had scarcely looked upon it, when he exclaimed in astonishment, "What do you say? Wonderful! wonderful! Zohrab's or his father's, indeed! How could such dogs have possessed such a treasure? It is the lady Amima's, as I am a true believer?"

"The lady Amima's!" cried Zulma, the fire of jealousy blazing forth into every feature. "How came it here?"

"Every suspicion which I have long entertained," said the humpback with a thoughtful look, accompanied by an extra

satanic grin, "is now confirmed. See, see! world, what art thou! I said that she loved him; the secret is out; this explains all. *Ahi Sadek! ahi Mariam!* and all ye accursed set, let us now see what will become of ye all, your insolence and your boasted power? We must go to the Shah; there must not be a moment's delay."

"But say," said the agitated Zulma, "what is the truth? How does this jewel explain the secret?"

"These emeralds, long made into armlets, and worn by the kings of Persia, belonged to the lady Amima's father, and when he was put to death were taken possession of by the Shah; it is not very long since he presented them to his niece. I know them well; they have frequently passed through my hands, and it was only a few days ago, when I last visited the Princess, that I saw this very ornament upon her arm."

"Then it must have been Zohrab Khan in person," exclaimed the maiden, as if a ray of conviction had flashed across her mind, "whom I saw descending from the turret."

"Without a doubt," said the humpback coolly. "Khajeh bashi! fool! dolt! You have brought your foul old carcass to a pretty market; rare work we shall have for the whole of our head-cutting tribe!"

Zulma, only taken up with the loss she had sustained in her lover, and burning to satisfy her revenge against her rival, little heeded the danger to which either herself or her father were exposed from the king's wrath: for Zohrab had been placed under his charge; to his care was committed the custody of his person, and he would be answerable for his loss. She could contemplate nothing but the destruction of Amima. The possession of the armlet found in Zohrab's room, with the corroborating circumstance of his descent from the terrace, acted as soothing balm to her seared heart. Without these proofs, so strong was the hold which the Princess had upon her uncle, that it would be impossible to convince him of her guilt. Any common conspiracy against her would only fall upon the heads of the plotters; but now it would be impossible to disprove facts such as those which she and the *Goozoo* possessed, and she felt that revenge already in her hand.

It was necessary, however, in order to screen themselves

from blame, that Zulma and her accomplice should make up some plausible story which might wear a character of truth, and be easily received as such.

"What shall we say for ourselves," said the humpback, "when the Shah asks how and where we found the armlet? It is all very well to get one's neighbour's head cut off, but let us secure our own at the same time."

"Ahî," said Zulma, "let me but see her torn into a thousand pieces, I care not what happens to me; death is preferable to life under circumstances such as these."

"For the name of Allah," exclaimed the alarmed liar, "do not talk thus! recollect that I have no rival!—that I am no lover!—that I entered into this business solely and entirely to please you! Do not let the innocent suffer for the guilty. What can we say to the Shah?"

The maiden sat in moody silence, her heart torn by a thousand contending emotions—the more she thought of her loss—of all that had taken place, and which had deprived her of Zohrab, the less she cared for her own safety. But her crooked companion was sorely put to his invention, to fabricate the protecting lie, that was to secure his own head. He began to feel of how much more consequence his own carcass was to him than that of his fair neighbour, and putting her, her father, and his family, out of the question, he thought of nobody but himself.

"Tell the truth," said Zulma, "tell exactly how it happened," excited by her reflections into a state of heroic indifference. "I care not for the consequences. Whatever is, so be it."

"Tell the truth, indeed!" exclaimed the humpback, in a lengthened tone of astonishment. "Are we mad! has sense taken leave of our brains! Shall we increase the imputation of being asses which the dervish has thrown upon our heads, by continuing to be so? No, no! if ever ingenuity was wanted 'tis now. 'A lie which gives security, is better than truth inducing strife,' said the sage Sheikh. He said well—well did he say—and by the beard of the prophet so we will act! Let me see, what can we devise? I have found it—I have it—thus, in the first place, what is the use of saying that you went to seek the dervish? Why publish your weakness to the world? Why invite every cow with a beard to laugh at you?"

"Hold," cried Zulma, "speak, but do not increase my misery by odious words thrown into my face."

"Therefore, we will simply say," continued the barber, "that I heard a rumour in the city that a more than ordinary stir had been remarked among the Asterabadis and the Turcomans; that many of them had been seen issuing from the gates of the city, and that consequently, in order to ascertain the safety of the hostage, I proceeded to the place of his confinement, which I found open and vacant—that there was every appearance of his having made his escape, and that on searching his apartment this armlet was found. In corroboration I will say, that he was seen from the terrace of your father's house descending from the Princess's turret. Have I said well?"

"Say what you like," said Zulma, "let them take our souls from us; I care not."

"*Astaferallah*, God forbid," exclaimed the *Goozoo*. "Life is sweet, and without it how shall we enjoy the revenge which we are about to take. *Mashallah!* there is still much happiness left for us. Why should you be thus cast down? Light of my eyes, open your heart."

"Happiness!" exclaimed the afflicted Zulma with a sigh. "Whatever you may feel, I know and care not—but happiness is lost to Zulma for ever."

"But recollect," said the barber, "nothing must be said of the state in which I passed the night; it must not be known how effectually my mouth can be stopped, lest on future occasions such a method might again be adopted. It must not be whispered how securely I was bound, and how oft I rolled over and over on this floor; the city would not cease laughing from this till the end of time. May its liver descend and its soul be dried up! But see," said he, "the sun is up, I must be gone, or the Shah will be enquiring for me; he is up too. Now be collected—drop your midnight excursion—say nothing of gags and bandages—and only wait till you are called upon, to swear that you saw Zohrab descending from the turret. Go now, in God's name go! or else we shall be found here together, and then who can save us?"

This truth effectually roused the disconsolate Zulma, and without saying a word more she left the apartment, and reached

her own room unobserved, whilst the barber took his way to the palace to perform his usual morning operation upon the person of his royal master.

In the meanwhile a strange commotion and stir had taken place among the *keshekchis*, or guards of the city gates. It had, in fact, been remarked that many Asterabadis and Turcomans by two and three at a time had left the city, and that they had not been seen to return; this circumstance had been reported at early dawn to their general, one of the highest officers about the court. He had no sooner heard it than in great alarm he mounted his horse and rode straight to the abode of the depatation. To his utter surprise he found it untenanted. No trace of either chiefs or subalterns, Asterabidis or Turcomans was there, save some *yaboots* and mules of no consequence, kitchen utensils, and some heavy baggage, with which it would have been dangerous for them to have been encumbered. All their famous horses were gone. In short it was plain that they were fairly off. It was suggested that they might have received permission from the Shah, or his vizir, to go to the *Ziaret** at Shah Abdul Azim, and happy at a gleam of hope, the general of the guard immediately despatched a horseman to that village to make the proper enquiries. It would require about an hour to go and return, and during that time he made up his mind to sit upon the carpet of patience, and smoke the *kalioun* of expectation. It was suggested also, that enquiries ought to be made of their mehmander, Shir Khan Beg, who probably might be better acquainted with their movements than any other person. A message was instantly sent to him, and before the general could smoke his second *kalioun*, this self-important personage appeared.

When the first ceremonies had been performed, the general said, "How is this, sir mehmander? Your charges have disappeared; can you give us any account of them?"

"What words are these?" said the consequential Beg. "My charges! I am neither their slave nor their servant; nor placed as a watch over them," looking significantly at the general. "The Shah has confided the whole of the negotiations into my hands. Those who have wit are called upon to use that wit;

* A famous place of devotion near Tehran, the shrine of a saint.

those who have eyes only, and no wit, are called upon to use those eyes. Shir Khan Beg, after all, is not a *gholam shah* for nothing," said he, looking with complacency over his well-dressed and, we will add, well-made person.

"Say what you will," said the general, "you will not make me believe that words have no meaning. Mehmander has a signification or it has not. It implies one who has the care of guests, or I do not know my own tongue. How then can he have the care of them if he be ignorant whether they exist or not? By what account do you calculate?"

"By what account, indeed!" said the enraged gholam; "can I sit at every gate in the city to watch their movements, and be in seven places at once? No lynx ever did that, with all its eyes; none but a general of keshekchis can do it, who, instead of taking his rest in the soft cushions of his anderoon, ought to be ever on the stir; awake to every thing, and with all his numerous guards at command, no mouse ought to creep out of the walls of Tehran without his being apprized of it."

"What words are these, you little man?" said the general, whilst the pride of a Kajar mounted into his head. "Will you teach me my duty? you, who are scarcely wise enough to keep your horse and musket in order, and gallop after the Shah? Go, go, Sir! seek your cows of Turcomans and Asterabadis, and let us know why they are absent."

"I am not your servant," said Shir Khan with a disdainful look, at the same time drawing up his handsome mustache to the corner of his eye, "I have no account to render to any one save to the Shah;" and upon that he arose in great form, and said, "May Allah take you into his holy keeping, and may your shadow never be less!"

He was not, however, in the least easy in his mind at the absence of his charges, for such they were, and his apprehension was much increased when he heard from the returning messenger, that they were not to be found at Shah Abdul Azim, nor any village in that direction, but that on the contrary, in the market-place, peasants had reported that they had been seen on the road to Mazanderan, travelling with every appearance of haste. Indeed, every one who was in the least connected with the care of the Asterabadis and Turcomans, began now to have fearful apprehensions of the results that might accrue to

them from the Shah's violence, owing to this unaccountable event. The general of keshekchis was slow in making up his mind to the necessity of informing the Grand Vizir of what had taken place, and Shir Khan Beg himself, who foreseaw all the disasters likely to fall upon the many individuals upon whom the anger of the king would be sure to alight, was far from not placing himself among that number, however advantageously he might think of his own precious person.

The commotion increased as the day advanced. It became generally known throughout the city, and every one who had relations of business with the individuals of the embassy, were seen running to and fro to the place which they had inhabited; some alarmed lest they should not be paid their dues, others delighted at having got rid of their creditors. It was expected at the great selam at noon that the whole matter would be made known to the Shah, and then those who were to blame would be punished. Every body, in the contemplation of such violence, looked melancholy, and were afflicted by dismal forebodings; for when once the anger of the Shah was roused, no-one, innocent or otherwise, could at all be certain that the blow might not alight upon his own head.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Your place is empty!

PERSIAN COMPLIMENT.

The humpback entered the Shah's apartment with a cautious and timid step, as he usually did, but instead of approaching at once to take possession of the head upon which it was his duty to operate, he stood aloof, throwing a most dolorous expression into the cast of his features, and putting his hands before him as if he would speak before he began to work.

"What has happened?" said the Shah.

"Hitch, nothing," answered the humpback; "your slave is waiting for a favourable moment."

"What words are these, varlet," exclaimed the Shah; "is the fool mad also?"

"Were your slave mad it would be well for him," said the barber. "A thing has happened—"

"And suppose it has, what then?" said the king; "is every fool in our kingdom to make a long face because a thing has happened?—Speak."

"As I am your sacrifice," said the humpback, "the Mazanderani—"

"What of him?" said the king, quickly; "he won't marry the executioner's daughter, we know that—so be it. Let him wait till his father's arrival."

"He will not wait," said the other, in a low and subdued tone.

"Not wait?" said the Shah, in an angry voice. "Are ye all mad? To-day he waits—to-morrow he won't wait—what words are these?—is this to be told the Shah?—explain."

"He will not wait, because he is gone," said the humpback; looking with great scrutiny at the Shah's turn of countenance as he spoke the last three words.

"Gone," repeated the king: "whither is he gone?"

"As I am your humble sacrifice," said the barber, "his room was this very morning found empty, and he is supposed to have fled the city."

"How—when—where? Speak!" said the king, his anger kindling as he uttered the words.

"The representation of the less than the least to the asylum of the world, is this:—Late in the day of yesterday, your slave heard that many of the Asterabadis and Turcomans had been observed issuing from the gates of the city; and this morning it struck him that there might be something more than common in this, and as a precautionary measure, your slave determined to ascertain whether the hostage was in safety. Your slave went to his apartment, and to his surprise he found it vacant—there was every appearance of his having taken his departure; but how and whither is still unknown to your slave."

"And the Asterabadis and the Turcomans," said the king; "what of them?"

"As I am your sacrifice, they are gone too," said the barber.

"Where is the wild dervish—the dervish Hezzarpicheh?" said the king, as he put on a thoughtful look.

"By the head and salt of the Shah," said the barber, "I know not; it did not strike your slave to inquire."

"Here *bachchah*, children," the Shah roared out to his attendants, upon which Sadek appeared, to whom he addressed himself—"Go to the cell of the dervish, and bring him hither without a moment's delay. Let the prime vizir, the chief executioner, and the head of the guard be at hand. Let the king's scarlet cloak be in readiness, and see that a full band of *ferash ghazeb*, of executioners, be in attendance at this day's selam."

The blood ran cold through the persons of his hearers as these words struck their ears, for well did they know what they portended. Sadek made his exit with all haste to execute his orders, but the humpback was destined to witness the lighting up of the fire of which he had laid the fuel. The dropping of the under jaw, the twitching of the mouth, the uplifting of the brow, and the vibration of the ears, all indicated the gathering of the storm, and come it did with a vengeance truly terrific.

"And I have been weak enough," said the Shah to himself, in a low and growling tone, "not to give heed to my suspicions. If we have indeed been laughed at, let those who laugh now look to themselves!"

The barber stood in fear before him, watching the uprising of his anger, uncertain whether or not he should be allowed to proceed in his morning's operation; he very soon saw, however, that until the fury of the storm had spent itself, it would be madness to put himself in its way.

Sadek soon returned, and stood before his master.

"Has the dervish been found?" said the king; "where is he?"

"As I am your sacrifice," answered Sadek, "he is not in his cell, and no one has seen him."

"It is even as I thought," mumbled the king to himself, "this must have been Zaul in person: no other man in Persia could have done this. Cause an instant search to be made for him and the hostage Zohrab, throughout the city," he roared out in

angry tones. "Let the country around be scoured in every direction, and send a strong detachment in the direction of Asterabad, and let every man who may be on the road be brought before us."

The ordinary mode of transacting business was, that each head of departments should receive their orders from the King himself; but on such occasions as the present, when the more persons he saw, the more he was anxious to proceed to punishment, Sadek himself, with that lurking principle of good which at times bestirred him, undertook to be the dispenser of the royal commands. The whole city and surrounding country were soon thrown into active search, and consequently scenes of injustice and cruelty took place, which are unknown excepting in the abodes of despotism. Every house was forcibly invaded, extortions ensued, private revenge found its opportunity, and a general fear and insecurity pervaded the whole community.

In the meanwhile, the prime vizir, the chief executioner, and the head of the royal guard, severally appeared before the Shah, and it was not long before every great officer of state was assembled at the royal gate, in readiness to answer questions, and to await the royal pleasure.

By this time the whole scheme of Zaul Khan for the rescue of his son had flashed across the Shah's mind, and he saw in the most vivid colours the extent of the trick which had been put upon him. That which at any other moment would have excited his utmost admiration, now only served to work up his feelings to the highest pitch of irritation. He was accustomed to look upon himself as the most quick-sighted and penetrating of human beings; what then was his mortification to find himself thus completely outwitted, and by one whom he so entirely despised! The feeling was maddening to the highest degree—he could scarcely contain his wrath from falling upon the whole city at once, so enraged was he at the situation of a dupe in which he thought he was placed. He fancied that he could detect the whole of his subjects laughing at and exulting over him, and in his mind's eye saw every man's finger pointed at him in derision.

The respect which he paid to his grand vizir restrained him from using violence towards his person; but the moment he

saw the chief executioner and the head of his guard, he fell upon them with the ferocity of a tiger. Without asking them a single question, he roared out to the ferashes in attendance —“*Bezur, bezur!* strike, strike these ill-begotten varlets,” and before they could make the smallest remonstrance, they found themselves on their backs, their feet in the air, and showers of blows from green poplar sticks pouring upon them. Most unluckily for them, as soon as the Shah had waved his hand to cease, Sadek stood before the king holding a coil of rope in his hand.

“What is that?” said the King.

“As I am your sacrifice,” said Sadek, “this was found tied to a gun near the house of the Nasakchi Bashi, and suspended from the wall into the ditch.”

“It is the dervish’s,” said the Shah; “of that there is no doubt. Let all further search cease; it is now plain whence he and Zohrab made their escape.” Then turning to the culprits who had been punished, he said—“Do you see this? From the house of one he escapes, and under the very nose of the other he scales our castle, and laughs at our beard. Dogs’ sons! is it thus you do the king’s business? Lay on again, in the name of Allah!” he cried out to the ferashes; “and, mind ye! the Shah is looking at you.” Upon which the poor men were again put to the torture, nor did this cruel operation cease until they were carried away insensible from the presence of the tyrant.

At every moment some new report was made to the King, which kept up his anger, and excited him to further violence. At length it was said that the dervish, in company with a woman, had been seen after midnight walking towards the chief executioner’s house. This roused all the humpback’s attention, and he immediately felt that, should this fact be investigated, he would be implicated, and then indeed what fate would be his!

The Shah ordered that the man who had seen the dervish so accompanied, should be brought before him, when one of the guards, a rough man, more dead than alive, a livid paleness showing itself under the roughest of beards and the most hairy of faces, was thrust forwards and stood before the King.

“Who are you?” said the Shah.

“What do I know?” answered the poor man, in a state of utter amazement.

"As I am your slave," said Sadek, seeing the unfortunate creature's disturbed state, "he is a keshekchi."

"What did you see last night?" said the king.

He endeavoured to stammer out some prefatory expressions of humility, but utterly failed, and at length said—"I saw the man of God and a woman."

"Why did you not seize them? Can such people walk about at night with impunity in my city? Mirza Hajji Ibrahim," turning round to his grand vizir, "what news is this? The orders of the Shah are looked upon as nothing."

"As I am your sacrifice," said the vizir, "there has been great neglect of duty."

"Why did you not seize them, O little man!" said the king to the keshekchi.

"What do I know?" answered the bewildered wretch; "I was afraid."

"*Mashallah!*" roared the king, his eyes firing up with rage. "Wonderful servants have we! And who was the woman?"

At this question the humpback began to feel very unsafe.

The poor keshekchi, having mustered up a little courage, answered—"As I am your sacrifice, I believe it was the *Bibi Nasakchi*, the lady executioner."

"In the name of Allah, who?" exclaimed the Shah.

"As I am your slave," said the humpback, who found it high time to speak, "he means the Begum Zulma, the chief executioner's daughter; but that cannot be, as I know she was in her own anderoon at that hour. It has come to your humble slave's recollection, that perhaps what he found in the hostage's room when he visited it this morning, may throw some light upon the enquiries of the asylum of the world." Upon this he drew forth from his bosom the armlet.

The Shah had no sooner received it into his own hand and cast his eyes upon it, than his whole nature seemed to undergo a quick revulsion. It was his turn now to tremble—but it was the tremor of jealousy, of rage, of abhorrence, of maddening fury. Breathing short, and evincing much prostration of strength, he said slowly to the humpback, "So you found this in Zohrab's room?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said the crafty wretch, "I did."

"And where?"

"Near the youth's pillow," answered he, with a significant look. The king drank these words as if poison had been mixed with them. He said nothing. His head sank dejectedly on his breast. Every sort of feeling, from the deepest tenderness to the most deadly revenge, ran in quick succession through his frame. At one moment his beautiful and retiring niece stood before his imagination in all the modesty of her nature; at another he saw her in the arms of his young prisoner, whilst he felt that he himself was the object of their derision. It was but a short time since with his own hands he had given her the armlet, which had belonged to her father: to find it restored to him in this manner, and with this story attached to it, was more than he could bear. His first impulse was to order instant execution upon her who had excited his wrath; but so malignant were his present feelings that he seemed to have pleasure in dwelling upon them, in order that he might devise a more sweet and perfect revenge. The pause, the awful pause, which ensued during these his cogitations was felt by those present as if they stood on the verge of eternity—as if they were awaiting the signature of their death-warrant, so sure were they that none but the most dire results could accrue from the delay. The eyes of all present were turned towards the dreaded awarer of their fate, in deep and breathless silence; it seemed as a mockery upon their misery, if the leaves of the surrounding trees even ventured to be agitated by the breeze, or the splashing fountains to throw out their refreshing waters.

At length rousing himself from his apparent stupor, like the deadly boa rising from torpor and preparing for a fresh victim, he wreaked the first effects of his rage upon the poor *keshekchi*: "Strike his neck," he roared out to the full extent of his terrible voice, as he looked upon the offender. "Go, and let others know what it is to be negligent of the Shah's affairs."

Upon this a *ferash ghazeb*, a most ferocious monster, stepped up, and with one blow of his sword, severed the wretched man's head from his body.

We will spare our readers the horrid acts of cruelty which succeeded this iniquitous execution. After he had begun the

exercise of his power in his inner apartments, the tyrant transferred himself to the great *Dewan Khanesh*, at his usual midday hour of giving audience, called the *Selam i Aum*, and there, clothed in his blood-coloured cloak, he gave full scope to the sanguinary dictates of his nature. It would be shocking to the feelings of those who only hear of executions after long and tedious investigations, and in solitary and marked instances, to be told the numbers of innocent as well as guilty persons who, almost without a reason, and all without a hearing, fell under the suspicions and the consequent death-stroke of this odious king. But let it not be thought that his subjects thought the worse of him for thus using his power. Instead of exciting feelings of opposition to his rule, he only the better secured his authority. 'Tis true they would call him a *shaitan*, a devil, a blood-drinker, a despot, but then at the same time they would add the epithet *ajaib*, wonderful, which in most of their minds would also imply "admirable." "*Ajaib Shahi*, wonderful king!" would they say of him. "If you want a lord of the sword, look to him—our king is indeed a king. Whose dogs are the Muscovites before him? You may talk of the Franks, their discipline, and their artillery: we spit upon their father's graves." 'Tis thus the Persians would rave in praises of their sanguinary king, and in this instance those who did not come under his displeasure were all in his favour, inasmuch as they felt that he had in fact cause for the exercise of his displeasure.

Among others, our garrulous friend, the boasting mehmander, had hitherto escaped observation, and standing in the midst of his companions, having thrown his cap more than was usual upon the side of his head, and thrust his shawl well over his hips, said: "This is what I call in truth being a king. Were I a king I also would look upon men's heads as dirt; *bah, bah, bah!*" said he, waving his hand horizontally, "how I would cut them off! I have a way of my own for cutting off heads. Of what use are guards if they do not keep watch? And that buffaloe their chief too, who pretended to teach me my duty; well did he eat the stick this morning! Well done, king, *barioallah!* We Persians are demons without the stick; what would they be with one of your quiet kings? Only put me at the head of the guards,

see what I would do. Make me Nasakchi bashi, *mashallah!* more feet should be beaten in a day than there are now in a week!"

He was going on at this rate when a ferash came up to him, and said, "The Shah wants you." At these words his cap almost by itself returned to its unpretending perpendicular position—his hands left his arrogant hips, and with paleness on his cheek, and a certain laxity in the back sinews of his legs, he slowly followed his conductor. "God take you into his keeping!" said one, in a titter. "Wonderful king is ours!" said another. "If I was a king, men's heads should be like dirt!" said a third. All this did not console him, and when he stood in presence of his royal master, he felt that he would much rather be in the presence of a Russian battery. His principal protection on this occasion was the Shah's own favourable feeling towards him; for although he was a vain boaster, and an impertinent babbler, yet he knew him to be brave and zealous in his service.

"And you, dog that you are," said the king, as the Beg appeared before him, "who would call yourself mehmander, what were you doing, when those under your charge were flying the city, and leaving you behind them to look like a fool and an ass that you are? Give him the stick! Stick you want, and stick you shall have!"

He began to roar, to remonstrate, and to entreat; all would not do, his feet soon looked upwards, and his nicely-attired person was not long in performing certain convolutions on the dusted pavement, as he writhed under the sharp blows which fell like hail upon him. His torture was not of long duration, but it had the effect of essentially stopping that constant flow of empty boastings with which he was afflicted, and making him a wiser mehmander.

When the king retired from the dewan khaneh, he returned to his private apartments, dismissing every body from his presence, excepting the humpback. During the whole of the public audience, his thoughts were entirely absorbed in the history of the *bazubend*, which, as if it were a piece of live coal within the folds of his garment, appeared burning for revenge. Now that he was free from other cares, he reverted to this with a degree of

savage eagerness, which spoke how entirely it had taken possession of his mind.

" You found it near the pillow, did you ?" said the Shah.

" As I am your sacrifice, I did," said the humpback.

" Did you remark any thing else ?" enquired the king.

" Nothing," said the humpback; " but—"

" But—what ?" roared the agitated monarch, in the utmost impatience.

" Your slave does not venture to say what he has heard," said the crafty barber, with assumed backwardness.

" Speak, wretch !" said the King, his eyes almost starting from their sockets; " speak, ere I cut your tongue out."

" As I am your sacrifice," said the other, " I was informed that a man was seen descending from the turret on that same night."

Upon hearing this, the Shah, without giving himself time to make more enquiries, gasped for breath. His senses appeared to be totally and entirely bewildered; he was as weak as a child, and his ferocity seemed for a moment to have forsaken him. All he could utter was—" Send for the Khajeh Bashi."

" At the sight of this officer, who was ever in close attendance, and who immediately made his appearance, shaking from fear, all his violence returned, and with a screech more like the tones of an animal than that of a human voice, he said—“ Pander ! there has been a man in the harem !”

The wretched creature to whom this was addressed so shook from head to foot, that his tongue refused to do its office, and he in vain tried to say the usual "*Corban et shuvum*." His jaw vibrated, and that was all.

" Speak !—where have been your eyes !—a man was seen descending from the turret !" said the Shah, the words scarcely finding utterance from his choaking throat.

" A man !—*Astaferrallah !*—Heaven forbid," said the poor wretch. " We know nothing of him. By the head of the Shah —by the salt of the King—your slave falls from the skies. What news is this ?"

By this time the deputy of the Khajeh Bashi had also been brought in, and he being a man of nerve, said, with all the humility possible, that if any thing of the sort had taken place,

it must have been when there was so much difficulty in making way to the turret chamber through the Banou's apartment, when the Shah last visited the lady Amima.

The words excited all the Shah's curiosity, and when the chief guardian, upon recollection, confessed that he had seen a collection of shawls tied together, hanging from the window frame in the turret, and that he had suspected that all was not right, conviction flashed upon the Shah's mind that the sacred precincts of his harem had been betrayed, and that his niece was guilty.

He required no further investigation—his mind was convinced—he dismissed every one from his presence, and he seemed to court solitude as a relief;—but far from being a relief it was increase of pain. The fire which raged in his breast, only burnt the more fiercely from the constant excitement of his own thoughts—a thousand resolves passed in quick succession through his mind; they all terminated in violence, but no violence which he could devise appeared to him sufficiently seasoned by revenge. It must be said that the sort of passion which he entertained for his niece was in nowise that of a lover for a mistress; it was a devoted tenderness, a sense of gratitude towards her for allowing him to feel that at least there was one creature in the world who cared for him. This hope he now learnt was a mere illusion of his brain; a false, hollow sentiment; and the consequent reaction, added to that of offended pride at the violated sacredness of his dignity, and of every other feeling which can most wound a Persian's honour, worked him up almost to phrenzy. "She dies!—she dies!" he was constantly repeating to himself, as he rested his head upon his hands, occasionally rising from his seat and walking to and fro. He devised many schemes for putting his intention into execution, but none accorded with his feelings. He thought of the turret as a fitting place to hurl her from; but he dreaded lest her cries might alarm the harem, who would rise in her favour. At one moment his fury roused him to do the deed himself. At another he would have seen it perpetrated before his eyes, in order that he might enjoy her sufferings; but when the moment for decision came, he found that in fact he was afraid of confronting her; so much did he feel how completely he was in her power when they were face to face.

At length he made up his mind, as to the best mode of effecting his purpose, and this was, to order her destruction without again seeing her. Sadek was a man in whose fidelity he knew he could trust, for he had never deceived him. His dogged resolution and courage were proof against every thing, and to him he determined to entrust the accomplishment of this dark deed. Accordingly he summoned him, and when he had ascertained that they were entirely alone and no ears within hearing, he caused him to approach almost within whispering distance, and then in a low and suppressed tone he said, with all that earnestness of manner for which he was famous—

“Sadek,” he said, “I have ever been satisfied with thy services. Thy king now requires a proof of thy devotion, which he can entrust to none other than thee.” The words which he was about to utter appeared to choke him. Calling up a long drawn sigh, and using great violence upon himself, he said—“Amima dies! I have said it. Take her hence this night—never let me see her more. Go—show her this—(giving him the armlet)—it will explain all.—Go—”

He would have said more; but respiration almost failed him Sadek, in wild consternation, would have answered and remonstrated at this cruel order; but the King made him signs, such as belong to a maniac, to be gone: and knowing what the reaction might be if he pressed the matter too hard, he kissed the ground and left the presence.

CHAPTER XXV.

The lady pressed her coal-black steed,
The slave he rode before;
Onward they sped o'er deserts wild,
Her home she saw no more.

EASTERN BALLAD.

AMIMA had been made acquainted with the events that had taken place as they occurred. Zohrab's flight, the one which had

most interested her, although at first received with a pang, yet on the whole gave her a true and sincere pleasure. That one moment which had assured her of his love, was at present a sufficient reward for every evil, and, as she felt aware that in their present circumstances, by no combination in their favour could they have been united, so, the next thing to wish for was his personal safety, and that she now felt was secured. She and her attendant Mariam, had been discussing over these events till late in the evening, and the usual profound stillness which reigned over the royal harem had long remained unbroken, when at the farther end of the court they heard the voices of men, accompanied by footsteps, as if they were proceeding towards them.

Conscious that she might be implicated in the Shah's wrath, however innocent, should Zohrab's visit to her apartments ever come to light, she could not fail to entertain great apprehension and fear, every time that any unusual noise was heard, or any strange person was admitted within the walls of her domain. As the footsteps approached, their fears were more awakened, and they became intense as soon as the curtain of her apartment was thrown on one side, and the Khajeh bashi, with his deputy, stood before them. In the Khajeh bashi's looks, too, there was a sinister and mysterious expression, so different from his usual most cringing, most abject manner, that Amima felt there were good reasons for her fear. Mariam's colour forsook her, and she stood like one on the point of execution.

"What has happened?" said Amima, putting on a resolute look. "Why do you disturb us thus late?"

"The Shah requires your attendance," said the eunuch.

"Why so late?" said the maiden. "This is unheard of. We are going to rest."

"The orders of the king are absolute. *Bishmillah*, in the name of Allah," said the inexorable man, with a dogged impertinence, quite foreign to his usual manner.

"But how? where? Here, Mariam," said she, "give me my veil and *chakchurs*," trembling with agitation.

"There is no necessity for a veil. Come quickly," said the Khajeh bashi.

"What insolence is this?" said the Princess, her blood excited by this want of respect. "I go before the Shah, and willingly;

but of this be certain, the first word I utter will be complaint of thee. Will the Shah consent to see his niece exposed to the gaze of man without her veil?"

Upon hearing these words the hideous creature indulged in a malignant exulting chuckle, as if he would have said, "Do thy worst, I laugh at thy threats."

This caught the attention of Mariam, and she was struck at once with the true meaning of his exultation; then every feeling of love and devotion for her mistress rushed into her heart, and seeing the danger which awaited her, and feeling that she was the cause of it, she bounded forward, and in accents of madness, as she threw her arms round her person, swore that no one should take her hence, and that nothing should separate them. Upon this the strong arm of the deputy Khajeh was called into action by orders of his chief; but notwithstanding his interference he would scarcely have mastered her, had not Amima herself commanded her to desist from further resistance. "I will go, Mariam," said she. "The Shah is just, though he may be violent. He shall learn all, and then be assured he will forgive that which he at present knows but imperfectly."

Upon which the heroic maiden, merely throwing a shawl over her head, left her peaceable and cherished apartments, and with a determined step followed the Khajeh bashi. Mariam would have followed also, but she was forcibly detained by the deputy, leaving the now unprotected and destitute Amima to listen to her sobs and wailings as she followed her conductor along the dark still courts of the harem. It was a trying moment to her fortitude; never had she ever been permitted to stir, without the attendance of more than regal state. What a contrast to her present forlorn situation! Her spirits kept up as she proceeded through the two or three courts which it was necessary to cross in order to reach the Shah's apartment, but when she found herself led on in a different direction, and taking her steps towards one of the exits of the harem, her heart sunk within her, and the most dismal forebodings came across her mind. In addition to the principal entrance, which is a lofty porch, guarded by a considerable body of black slaves, there is a secret portal, so small that it requires the person passing it to stoop, and it was hither the Khajeh bashi conducted our heroine. It is situated immediately on the brink of the ditch which encompasses the

Ark, and a small bye-path leads to the drawbridge, which enters upon the great square of the city. With difficulty it was opened, seeing that it was but seldom used, and only upon secret and mysterious occasions, such as the present. After much exertion at length the Khajeh bashi forced it open, and there in the gloom of the night she could just discern a man holding two horses. The old eunuch, who held a small lantern in his hand, raising it, exhibited to the eyes of the trembling maiden her future conductor, completely muffled up from head to foot, as a disguise to his person, and who immediately advanced one of the horses towards her. Here her heart had nearly failed, and she enquired from the Khajeh bashi, what this all meant, and why he did not take her to the Shah?

"Mount this horse," was all the answer she received.

"I go not," said Amima, roused into anger, "until I see the king."

"Speak not, but mount," said the heard-hearted wretch.

The forlorn maiden now discovered the full extent of her danger, and the horrors of death, such as she knew had before been frequently inflicted upon unfortunate women, burst upon her senses, and harrowed up all her fears. The more she persisted in not stirring till she had seen her uncle, the less did the wretch in whose hands she was, seem to respect her;—at length, she said—"Tell me, in pity, why am I brought here? What is my crime, that I am treated thus like a common criminal?"

Upon this the demon in human shape, who stood near her, holding up the light with one hand, with the other exhibited to her eyes, in a manner not to be mistaken, the cherished though mischievous armlet. At the sight of this further explanation was unnecessary;—the whole extent of her misfortune was placed in the strongest colours before her, and the executioner's arm was scarcely required, so totally had life apparently forsaken her frame. This agitation however did not to all appearance excite any pity in her conductors; an interval was allowed her to recover, when the muffled up figure approached to assist her to mount, and from him she thought she heard the words "Fear not," spoken in a scarcely audible whisper, which in some measure gave her courage. With difficulty she was seated, and then, without more ado, the new conductor mounted

the second horse, and guiding her's by a leading string, slowly took their way along the narrow path on the limits of the ditch, and straightway crossed the drawbridge. The horses appeared to be of the finest quality: they threaded the mazes of the city in a quick amble, and when once they had passed the gates, which were opened and shut again in a most mysterious manner, without a word being spoken, they struck into a rapid pace, which very soon became a gallop. Without speaking, the mysterious conductor dashed onward with increasing velocity, scarcely looking back, and apparently unconscious whether what was placed upon the horse which followed him was a living creature or inanimate lumber. Onwards they went—the plain of Tehran was rapidly crossed—the intricacies of the intervening mountains were as quickly passed; nothing stopped their career, the horses only seemed to acquire fresh vigour from the intenseness of their speed, and the ground disappeared from under their hoofs with an ease and facility that was almost superhuman. So strange, so appalling, but at the same time so invigorating was the situation in which Amima was placed, that with her senses bewildered, and her body in violent action, she could in no manner collect her thoughts. Her mysterious conductor rode onward some three yards before her, and all she could discern in the darkness was a mass, bounding before her, which she seemed ever on the point of overtaking, but which was always there, neither further nor nearer. At length the delicacy of her frame began to feel this great and continuous motion, and she ventured to utter a low shriek of remonstrance. Her conductor heeded it not;—head, shoulders, legs, and horse went bounding on, up and down, up and down, as if it had been a machine set to perform a certain piece of work, totally divested of hearing or sensation. Again she shrieked, louder and still louder. She might as well have complained to the wind; not the slightest notice was taken of her. By this time they had crossed much of the high road to Ispahan, and as they came to the confines of the Great Salt Desert, slanting to the east, they struck into a track of the most naked region of wilderness, apparently without the vestige of a path to direct them, and nothing but the first dawn of day to give light to their horses' footsteps. Here their speed appeared to increase;—it seemed as if a new world, one which the ima-

gination might create to itself as a type of the regions of future punishment, was spread before them;—a soil arid, thirsty, and sulphureous—with no vegetation save here and there long withered rushes, creaking to and fro before the blast, broken up into fantastic shaped masses which crumbled into forms of hideous angular faces, or gigantic monsters. This was the region, over which no Persian ever travelled without putting up prayers for a safe journey. It was famous throughout the country as the resort of *ghouls* and wood demons, and having accomplished it, he blessed his prophet for a safe deliverance from danger.

A low moaning wind was wont to blow over the waste, which sometimes increased into furious blasts, and at others died away into melancholy murmurs. Rising at break of day it gained strength as the sun rose, and continued to blow with more or less violence during the twenty-four hours. As the two horses and their riders bounded over the cheerless wilderness they might have been taken for the genii of the place—their appearance a dark outline, their speed unchecked, and their direction apparently undefined, seemingly bent on business of mysterious import, maintaining an awful silence, which was broken ever and anon by wild screeches from the suffering maiden, which were borne unheeded away upon the passing blast.

The wretched Amima was now almost entirely exhausted; her guide seemed however to keep one steady, undeviating line, towards a mound of curious and abrupt form, that rose conspicuous, though but little, above the surface of the surrounding wilderness. The same deserted and uninhabited character reigned throughout the region over which they passed, as far as the eye could reach, and they now appeared farther than ever from the abode of mortals; when of a sudden the mysterious guide stopped; the horses, all panting, but still not distressed, stood with their heads towards each other; the wretched Amima, more dead than alive, almost dropped off her horse as her disguised companion helped her to dismount. His manner was respectful, but as he neither spoke nor gave her the least sign of recognition, she could not discover who or what he was. She now would have thrown herself upon his mercy, but when about to address him, to her utter horror and

dismay she saw him again mount his horse, and leading off the other, dart from before her with the same reckless and unrelenting speed. He merely disengaged a bundle which had been hanging at his saddle-bow, and threw it towards her; she thought however, that as he darted off, she heard him again repeat the words, "Fear not!" which he had used on their first meeting. Her heart drooped in despair when she listened to the sound of the horse's hoofs as they gradually died away upon her ear; all the horrors of her situation now came pouring upon her imagination, like hideous phantoms, passing in grim array before her, until she saw death in all its various and most appalling shapes. Her beautiful form covered with a shawl, her head supported by her hand, rested against a projection of the arid soil, and seemed like a creation foreign to the horrors by which she was surrounded. She first dwelt upon the pangs of famine, then she thought of beasts of prey, of the famished wolf, or the wild hyæna, which she knew were common to this track. Again she dreaded to become a prize to the famished vultures of the desert, who so mysteriously gather together apparently by one common consent. Thus abandoned, thus hopelessly left to die, she dropped on her knees, and there, in the midst of this howling wilderness, was to be seen her angel form, imploring in the most ardent and heart-rending accents, the assistance and mercy of that Almighty Being whom she knew and felt to be the refuge of all his creatures. Every act and thought of her past existence were brought before her, as if she were actually called upon to give an account of her conduct in this world, and with all the real humility of her nature, she deplored her unworthiness, and prayed for forgiveness. This exercise soothed and refreshed her, but still fear predominated; every sound of the passing blast, every rustle of the withered reed, made her blood creep, and conjured up a thousand real or imaginary dangers.

In the meanwhile, the day had dawned, the east was slightly streaked with red, and the hideous landscape was now sufficiently lighted up to exhibit all its deformity. Objects became more distinct in the west upon which the light gleamed, but as seen opposed to the rising sun, were not immediately to be recognized. The maiden's eyes were turned to that direction. Of a sudden she perceived something move upon the verge of the horizon

it was evidently a living object; it moved onwards and towards herself. Immediately all her fears were roused; she thought she discerned the wild animal so much dreaded. Her mind was not insensible to the fear of supernatural beings: the midnight spectre; the ghoul, that searcher for corpses and lover of human flesh; every horror which she had ever heard in her infancy, repeated to her in maturer years, and now rendered certain by the power of her imagination, came before her mind, and as the being approached, her eyes became fixed; she would have screamed but could not. She at length gave utterance to one long, agonized cry, and then all animation leaving her exhausted frame, she fell into a state of total insensibility.

This so much dreaded being was nothing more or less than a creature of flesh and blood, in the shape of a youth of about fourteen years of age. He was a fine, well-made, hardy-looking boy, wild in his appearance as a child of one of the rural gods might be drawn; very rudely clothed, his hair hanging wild and unshorn about his shoulders, and bearing every appearance of living almost in a state of nature. Upon hearing the cry uttered by the affrighted maiden, he looked about him in amazement, such sounds being totally foreign to his ear, and at length he discovered her. He approached with a slow and cautious step, as if she had been an animal of a new species, and when he had fully distinguished her whole form, his eyes became riveted upon her beautiful face with such intensity, that he appeared like one transfixed. Thinking her asleep, he was cautious in his approaches, but when he remarked the paleness of her cheek, and her death-like appearance, he feared that she might be dead. His young heart had never before known this state of perplexity; an object at once so new and so attractive had never before met his eyes, and he remained, with outstretched neck, staring eyes, and open mouth, uncertain what to do—to leave her there and seek for assistance, or to help her himself. The latter resolve at length prevailed; summoning all his resolution he went close to her, and first touched her face with the tip of his finger; it felt as cold as stone; this gave him courage, for she stirred not, and he then uplifted her hand; he thought he saw her move, and in order to ascertain this, he began to rub it with all his might. This indeed roused her, and he was overjoyed; he continued his efforts, until, to his delight,

she opened her eyes ; but when she caught the first glimpse of the youth she gave so sudden a scream, that he bounded back in alarm. At the sight of one so strange and so wild, her strength returned almost suddenly, and she immediately arose, when clasping her shawl about her face so as to screen it, she retreated some paces. He, on the contrary, advanced ; but with a manér so respectful that she soon bade adieu to alarm on his account, and ventured to speak to him. "Where am I?" said she ; "as you are a Mussulman and love Allah, speak!"

The wild creature, hearing sounds so sweet from a mouth so bewitching, almost danced for joy ; and lent his ear to catch their meaning.

"Who are you?" said she, trying him upon another subject; "whence come you?"

These words he immediately understood, and he answered, "I am Ali Murad. Do you know me?"

"But what are you?" said she.

"I am my father's son," said the simple creature.

"Where do you live?" enquired the maiden.

"Even here," answered he. "Come, come!"

"Who is your father?" still enquired she.

"He is Hussein, the white beard," he answered. "Do you know him?"

"What is his business?" said Amima with great eagerness.

The boy looked sad, and made no answer at first. Then, with a sigh, he said, "*Hitch, nothing.*" After this, putting up his hands to his eyes, which he shut, said sorrowfully, "He is blind!"

Amima cast her eyes about, searching for the habitation which the boy seemed to point out as near at hand ; but in vain. At the same time she discovered her bundle, which she eagerly opened, in the hope of ascertaining by its contents what might be her fate ; but all she found was a complete suit of a woman's dress, adapted to the wants of a well-clad peasant, and a purse of money. In vain she turned over in her mind what this could mean, and the only conclusion at which she arrived was, that her destruction was not intended. So far there was consolation in the discovery ; but when she turned round, and saw the hopeless state of abandonment to which she was thrown, and the companion allotted to her, her heart sunk within her. She followed

Ali Murad, as he led the way, and the first sign of habitation which she saw was a well, to the neighbourhood of which she probably owed her preservation; for he evidently had come hither to draw water. Upon passing the mound before alluded to, towards which the mysterious guide had bent his steps, they came immediately upon a low clay-built hovel, scarcely from its colour to be distinguished from the soil upon which it stood. It was rudely covered over with brambles, upon which a coating of clay had been placed. In front it presented a door and two paper-covered windows, and to all outward appearance was the abode of the most wretched of Persian *rayats*. Hither, however, the boy conducted the forlorn Amima, looking into her eyes to discover her surprise and admiration at the sight of what he supposed must be the most magnificent of mansions.

Preceding her some steps, he rushed into the hovel, and soon after came forward, conducting a blind man by the hand. Although dressed in the rudest manner, with clothes of the most common materials, yet his whole appearance announced great dignity. Though his eyesight was gone, yet the expression of his countenance was noble and commanding. His beard, blanched either by age or misfortune, swept his girdle; and upon seeing him, an internal conviction was produced that he was one who had known better days.

As he advanced towards Amima, led on by Ali Murad, she heard him exclaim, "A woman, did you say, Ali Murad? How, in the name of Allah, came she hither?"

"Here she is," said the boy; "speak to her."

Amima, upon perceiving this person, felt for him all the respect which his appearance would command: and dwelling upon his fine features, expressive of kindness and benignity, with the rapture of one who, having been exposed to great danger, had at length found safety, she approached him with confidence.

"Is it true," said the old man, "that thou art a woman, sick, and in distress? Who and what art thou? How camest thou here? The desert is no place for such as thee."

Amima was distressed at these questions; for she knew not what conduct to adopt, in a situation to her so new and so embarrassing. She became shy at answering them, and, unwilling to discover who she was, determined to say nothing on that head for the present. She answered generally, that by the

most unaccountable violence she had been dragged from her home, and as she unwittingly had given rise to some person's enmity, had been thus abandoned in the desert, and probably left to starve and die. "But see," said she, "the providence of God! You are come to my assistance, and in you I claim a protector."

"Whatever we possess is yours," said the stranger. "We are creatures of the wilderness. Excepting shelter for your head, and food to keep you alive, we have little else to offer; but to that you are welcome. Come, take your rest."

As they advanced towards the house, Hussein Aga, in a strong voice, cried out to one within, who appeared to be a third inmate, to come forth; when an old crone, almost bent double with age, came hobbling out. She received his orders to take care of his new guest, and very soon prepared so to do, although her surprise at seeing Amima was such, that she could scarcely refrain from muttering "*Ajaib!*" and "*Allah, Allah il Allah!*" for the rest of the day—so wonderful did it appear that any thing mortal could have found its way into the depths of the wilderness.

The cottage was by no means so small as on its first appearance it promised to be. It contained a small inner room, which the old woman inhabited, and which she now made over to Amima. Though rude in its materials as any peasant's hovel, still it was clean; the walls thereof were whitewashed, and it had the proper complement of furniture common to every Persian room, namely a carpet and three nummuds. Here her hospitable friends invited her to take the rest which she so much wanted; and although the bed which they spread for her use was sufficiently rude, yet such was the fatigue she had undergone, that it answered as good purpose as the luxurious couches which she had so recently left, and very soon she had forgotten her miseries in that temporary cure of all evils—a sound sleep.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Two cocks fought one day. The vanquished fled, and hid in a secret place.

LOCMAN.

AMIMA having had time to collect her thoughts, was now fully persuaded that the Shah had intended her death, but through the interference of some kind person her life had been spared, and that she had intentionally been placed where she now was. However dismal might be the prospects of her future fate, if she were indeed destined to pass her existence in this place of exile, still she was safe; the vicissitudes of life were such, particularly in so unsettled a community as her own, that the same destiny which had thrown her into the desert might again take her from it; and gilding the horizon of her future prospects with a bright ray of hope, her mind could look forward to the time when, forgetting her present miseries, she might be united for ever to the man of her choice. Her most urgent desire now was to learn of whom she was the guest. It was evident that her silver-bearded host was a personage of consequence, about whom there was much mystery, and whose seclusion was, like her own, caused by fear of detection. To this his appearance, his manner, and language bore testimony; and as the person who had thus thrown them together, must have done it intentionally, it was evident that his object could not be that of keeping them unacquainted with each other's situation. She determined therefore upon the first opportunity to make known who she was to the old man, upon a promise that he would confer a similar favour upon herself.

This opportunity was not long wanting. As soon as she had been refreshed by rest, having returned her thanks to Allah for her deliverance from danger, she left her chamber and sought her host.

He was seated in a corner of his own miserable room, count-

ing his beads and repeating his *Astaferallahs*, with an expression of content and resignation imprinted upon his features, which seemed to say how much habit had reconciled him to his present forlorn state.

As soon as he heard her approach, her light step being a sound totally new to him, he immediately recognized her, and said, “*Bismillah!* come and sit near me, O daughter! Let not a broken and sightless man like me frighten thee. Who ever thou art, may God’s blessing be upon thee!”

“Pray for me,” said Amima, affected upon hearing these kind words. “Pray for me, father—I seek your protection.—May your shadow never be less!”

“You have been in my mind,” said the old man, “ever since you have been here. Your coming is wonderful. By what stroke of destiny you have found this hole in the wilderness, has not yet reached my understanding. Ali Murad tells me, that every thing in you bespeaks a being of a superior order. He talks of your clothes as things to which his imagination has not yet reached, and of your beauty as of something surpassing belief. Speak, O daughter! say why are you come here; and, for the love of Allah, who are ye?”

The more the maiden conversed with the stranger, the more her heart inclined towards him. He had created a feeling in her breast which had secured all her confidence, and which urged her to keep nothing secret from him.

“Upon my eyes be it,” said Amima, “I have nothing to conceal; but you must in return promise to relate to me your history; for believe me you have as much interested me as I can have interested you.”

“I place myself in your hands,” said he, with a slight hesitation in his manner. “You shall judge how far I can trust any one to hear my tale, when I tell you beforehand that I am not supposed to exist among the sons of men. I am looked upon as dead; and in truth I endeavour to think myself so.”

“You can have no confidence in a stranger like me, I grant,” she said; “but perhaps when you have heard my story, you will find that I am not totally unworthy of it.”

“In the name of the prophet, speak on!” said the stranger; “I am impatient.”

“It has often been the occupation of my solitary moments,”

said Amima, "to endeavour to call up some recollection of my father and mother, but in vain. I have in various ways heard much concerning them, but never has any distinct image of their persons been established in my mind. I was therefore quite an infant when I lost their protection. They have always been described to me as unfortunate persons, whose fates are mixed up with the many revolutions and scenes of horror which were common to Persia, before the present king succeeded in establishing a complete sway over the whole country. My father in particular was one to whom the vicissitudes of life were common. He was a brave soldier, sometimes a fortunate one,—possessing at one time great power and great riches, at another as much the contrary, reduced to a few followers from commanding armies, and living upon the wild fruits of the mountains, when before he had enjoyed the refinements of luxury."

"Allah! Allah!" exclaimed the old man, with the greatest interest in his manner, "you are relating my own history."

"As far as I can recollect of myself, I know that I had and have a brother, who is the only being" (here she faltered and blushed) "whom I really loved as a child. Of those under whose care we were placed I have no distinct idea, saving one old nurse who brought us up as a mother—but as I grew up I was surrounded by great splendour, I was flattered, I was called banou and princess. My clothes were those of royalty, my attendants were those of a queen, and I have always called the Shah my uncle."

"Ahî," said the stranger, "what words are you speaking! In the name of God, then, who was your father?"

"I was told he was the Shah's brother," said the maiden, alarmed at the great interest which she had created.

"And what is your name?" said he.

"I am called Amima," she replied.

"Can it be!" exclaimed the old man, in a transport of joy and astonishment. "O God! can it be? Art thou indeed Amima, daughter of Hussein Kûli? If so, thou art mine—my Amima—my daughter! Where art thou?" extending his arms as he spoke; "come to me, my soul!"

It would be impossible fully to describe the sensations which arose in the breasts of both father and daughter. It sufficed

that they identified each other. The miseries of the exile to which they were condemned seemed at once to have vanished. New feelings and new interests at once sprung up, and the wilderness by which they were surrounded no longer retained that horrid character which had before belonged to it. Amima, who willingly yielded to the joy of possessing a father, after having testified to him by every means in her power her determination never to leave him, but to devote herself to his comfort, expressed her anxiety to learn by what circumstances he had been thrown in the situation where she had now found him.

"The story is long, and it will require some time, my child," said the broken Khan, "to collect my thoughts and revive my recollections of the past. Many years of utter solitude have almost made your father forget that he ever belonged to the community of man. It is difficult for the mind, which has acquired the habit of thinking solely of an hereafter, to return again to the things of this world. But tell me first of your brother. You mentioned him; and having regained you and hearing of him, I find myself as it were restored to life. Tell me, where is Fatteh Ali? Does he live, or has the tyrant deprived me also of him?"

"He lives, and is well," said Amima. She then related that part of his history with which she was acquainted; describing their last interview before he set off to take possession of the government of Fars, and cheered her father's heart by a most favourable account both of his person, his accomplishments, and his conduct.

"I am grateful to thee at least for that, O my brother!" said he, as he apostrophized the Shah; and giving way to an audible reverie. "Thou hast preserved thy nephew and thy niece, because thou hast been rid of thy brother." Then, seemingly absorbed in calling up recollections of the past, he said to his daughter, "It is so long since I have retired from the world, that with difficulty I can recall the history of my past life, but it is of consequence that you should know it. I will give you the summary of it now, and you shall hear more of it in its different details, as they come to my memory."

The maiden shuddered to think how much more than leisure they would be likely to possess for that purpose, but grasping

her father's hand, she entreated him to gratify her curiosity, and having placed herself in an attitude of great attention he thus began :—

“ My father was a celebrated chieftain of the Kajar tribe, whose principal residence was in Mazanderan. His name was Mahomed Hussein Khan. He had two sons, namely, the present Shah and myself. When we were quite infants, Adil Shah, successor to the famous Nadir, took up his residence in Mazanderan, which obliged my father to leave his home in Asterabad and seek refuge among the Turcomans. There my brother and I passed our first infancy, our father at the same time exerting himself to raise up enemies against Adil Shah, who had taken possession of the province over which he had formerly held full sway. Adil Shah, desirous of destroying so dangerous an enemy, by bribes managed to obtain possession of both my brother and myself, in order to secure hostages for my father's good behaviour. We remained unmolested for some time in his hands, but my father exhibiting some indications of disobedience, the cruel tyrant emasculated my brother, leaving me for a similar fate at the next appearance of rebellion which might be shown by our parent. Before, however, he could put his intention into execution, Adil Shah died, and we immediately returned to our father, who finding himself free, raised the standard of revolt against Kerim Khan, then the Vekil, as he called himself, of Persia, and in possession of Fars; and leaving his woody fastnesses of Mazanderan, entered into the open country of Irâk, and marched upon Ispahan.

“ My brother and I were then quite striplings—he about eighteen, and I one year younger. The cruel manner in which my brother was treated, had at a very early period impaired the original frame of his character : from being of an open and joyous disposition, he became gloomy and suspicious ; and although we were entirely brought up together, and although he loved me better than any other person in the world, if such a sentiment as love could ever find a place in his breast, yet even of me he was ever jealous, secretly hating that destiny which had made the hand of cruelty fall upon himself rather than upon me.

“ He early began to perceive how inferior in person he was to those with whom we associated, and therefore turned all his

endeavours to the improvement of his acute and intelligent mind, by which he gained an extraordinary ascendancy over every one with whom he conversed or transacted business. He also ceded to none in manly exercises; for though his person, to outward appearance, was wan and emaciated, still he possessed great muscular powers, and could endure as much fatigue as the hardiest marauder. Although the youngest, yet I was more courted than my brother, owing perhaps to the superiority of my person, which most probably laid the foundation of that inveterate hatred in his breast which in after-life broke out so terribly against me, and brought on my present misfortunes.

“ My father, at the head of his followers, and supported by his son, met Kerim Khan’s troops near Ispahan. This was the first real battle in which my brother and myself had been engaged, and never shall I forget the effect which it produced upon me. He, in full possession of his presence of mind, knew precisely what orders to give, and whither to direct the troops; I was all fire and impetuosity, and only felt myself right as long as I remained under the control of my brother. The battle was a desperate rush on both sides, in which the numbers of Kerim Khan’s troops overpowered ours, though we evidently bore off the palm in bravery. Unluckily, in the very heat of the fight, when we thought that victory was about to crown our exertions, my father fell dead from a musket-ball which pierced his heart, and my brother, endeavouring to keep possession of his body, was surrounded and taken prisoner. A total rout of our troops immediately ensued, in which I was fortunate enough to make my escape, having the mortification to see my brother borne away hopelessly from me.

“ My father’s followers having lost their chief, and seeing in me nothing but an inexperienced youth, soon left me and dispersed, some to their homes,—others, forming themselves into small predatory bands, continued to infest the country. I was left almost alone, only ten men of our own family and tribe remaining faithful to me. So little was I yet broken into the reverses of life, that not having learnt to put my trust in Allah, I placed my head upon my knees, and fairly cried for hours together. At length an old white-beard of my father’s, one of his *yuz bashi*, who had seen me born, and who had faithfully stuck by him in all vicissitudes, came to me and said, ‘ God is

great—God is merciful—who can withstand destiny? I, whose beard is grey, have seen the tops and bottoms of things, and know that there are good days as well as bad days. Why therefore should you repine? *Mashallah*, you are young! praise be to Allah, you are a fine youth! you can ride well; and, although I say it, you are a lord of the sword; why therefore, lose hope? Hearken to the words, of an old servant. Wind up your spirits, set your brain in good order, and collect your energies. Let us go, and God go with us! *Inshallah*, our destinies will take a good turn. We will burn the father of the first enemy we meet, and drink his blood ;—what do you want more?

“ This language cheered me, and I arose from my grief with the intention of returning to our house at Asterabad, and resuming the friendship which my father had formed among the Turcomans. I succeeded in making my way home, living upon the country as I and my companions travelled onwards. Afterwards, for several successive years I joined myself occasionally to *chappows* made by the Turcomans, and by little and little acquired the character of a *Sahib Shemshir*, a man of the sword, together with the confidence of a large band of adventurers. I never heard from my brother except by uncertain reports, but I knew that he was still detained by Kerim Khan ; and once I was assured by a Mollah who came to Astarabad, that he was considerably esteemed at that chieftain’s court, and by his wisdom and ability had succeeded in securing his confidence and good-will. ”

“ During these days of my vagabond life I married your mother. My Amima was the most lovely maiden among the Turcomans, fair as a houri, excellent as an angel, and rumoured as the greatest beauty of the plains of Kipchak. Her father was the most powerful whitebeard of the Turcoman Obahs, rich in sheep and mares, and whose opinion was courted far and wide. As soon as I became his son-in-law, I found myself at once raised to power; for, what with my family in Asterabad, and my connexion with the Turcomans, so many were those who courted me and flocked to my gate, that I willingly listened to the flattering assurances which they constantly poured into my ears, that I alone was worthy of being the sovereign of Persia. Who is there, my Amima ! among God’s creatures, who once in his life at least does not eat dirt ? This was my destiny, and my turn was come for eating

it. My flatterers mixed up a bowl of vanity, which I drank off, and as its intoxicating contents passed over the palate of exultation, they swelled my heart with arrogance, and my bowels with ambition. In short, I made the *ada ul sultanet*, I became a pretender to the throne. I found myself surrounded with a host of needy though hardy soldiers, accustomed to the warfare of marauders, skilled in attack and cunning in retreat; and as I promised largely, the body which at first collected was soon increased to a very imposing force; more horses neighing in the tethers, and more pots boiling on my hearth, than had been known since the days of Nadir the conqueror.

“After having subjected much of Mazanderan, I crossed the mountains and laid Khorassan under contribution. I took possession of Meshed, and there I first assumed the airs of a king. I mounted a *jika*, I wore *bazubends*, I ascended a musnud, and every day I had a *selam*, men bowing before me, and telling me that I was God’s shadow upon earth. Young as I was, full of self-importance, elated by the success which attended me, I projected an extension of my dominions, and determined to march upon Ispahan.

“In the meanwhile, the reports of my success had spread far and wide throughout Persia, and called the attention of the Vekil to my undertakings. I soon heard that I was about to be vigorously opposed, and that an army from Shiraz was marching upon me. I and my followers were full of security in our success. We despised the southern Persians, womanlike-men as we called them; and in opposition to their effeminacy, claimed for ourselves the title of *kizzelbashes*,—descendants of Nadir,—the lion-eaters of the North.

“At length, after much expectation, one morning, not far from Mürchekhord, the site of a famous battle, we saw a large body of cavalry, which we recognized to be men of Fars, Arabs, and Balouchistanis. A halt was made on both sides; both parties looked at each other like wrestlers watching where to plant the first blow, or like lions lashing themselves up to combat. After some delay, all at once I perceived a single horseman dash forward from the condensed mass, and furiously urging his horse towards us, advance with increasing speed. As he approached, it appeared as if his person was not new to me. I ordered one of my gholams to meet him. He did not heed him, but passed

on contemptuously. As he still came nearer I exclaimed, 'Who is that? In the name of Allah! can it be?' Before I could utter another word I found myself in the arms of my brother!

"A horse-covering was soon spread for us on the ground, and there, in the face of our united forces, we related our respective histories. My brother informed me that he had managed to secure the entire confidence of Kerim Khan, and that for a long while he had ruled him almost entirely; that the enterprise in which he was now engaged had long been a concerted plan; that the Khan had, of his own accord, proposed that my brother should head the troops which he now sent against me: in short, he informed me, that hearing of my success, he was now come to join me, and he did not despair, with the accession of force which he brought (for he had succeeded in bringing the troops over to himself), that we might make head against the power of Kerim Khan, and secure to ourselves the kingdom.

"As you may suppose, I was delighted with this most unlooked-for piece of good fortune, and willingly agreed to every scheme which my brother suggested. In my joy at seeing him, and in the enthusiasm of the moment, I even offered to resign to him, as my elder brother, the crown which I had placed upon my own head. He said nothing at the moment, either in the affirmative or the negative, but orders were immediately given for taking possession of Ispahan, which we entered together in all the power and state of royalty.

"My brother insisted upon my sending for my wife and family, in order that he might see them, and enjoy the pleasure of knowing those so near and dear to him, long as he had been deprived of the consolation of relationship. They came. You then, my Amima, were a blooming child, and your brother Fatteh Ali a noble boy, beautiful as a rose. Your uncle then first gave him the endearing name of Baba Khan, which I suppose he keeps to this day—and treated you both with all the kindness which his wayward nature would permit. For some time I continued to appear the ostensible monarch, although in the eyes of the people we shared the honours of that station.

"But now comes the afflicting portion of my story. It is evident that two suns cannot shine in one hemisphere, as well as that two kings cannot sit upon one throne. Jealousies arose

between us; my brother had early set every instrument to work to secure to himself the majority of voices in his favour, and I soon began to feel the effects of his intrigues. At length things came to such a pass between us that I determined, upon pretext of quelling certain rebels in Khorassan, to separate from him; and accordingly gathered all my own followers about me, previously to my departure. On the very night of our separation,—would you believe it, my Amima?—that brother for whom I had done so much, whom in my heart I loved, and who pretended to return my affection, sent a gang of ruffians, who seized me, threw me down, and with the most unfeeling cruelty deprived me of my eyes; and that in a manner the most monstrous, digging them from their sockets with the points of their daggers. Ah, I shall never forget both the horrors of mind and body which I then experienced!—and to crown all, my brother, with the perfection of hypocrisy, came to me, crying and bewailing my misfortune, upbraiding the wretches who had performed the deed, as if they had acted of their own accord, and threatening to sacrifice them to his vengeance.

“In time I recovered; but my brother’s cruelty killed your poor mother. Ah, my child! how shall I ever make you feel the horrors of my situation? I still cherished life, supported by my love for you and your brother; but oftentimes would I call upon death as my only refuge. The love which the people in general bore me was great, and many of my followers still adhered to my fortunes with constancy. This became a crime in the eyes of the new king; and it was plain, that, having gone the length he had done, he determined to play the whole game. Cruelty and despotism became now the foundation of his character—no law human or divine could stop him, when ambition or passion prompted him on. He made a charge of conspiracy against me, and determined to rid himself entirely of one who by his existence alone constantly upbraided him with his crimes. Sadek, a Georgian slave, who had adhered to my brother as the eldest, was the person in whom he placed the most confidence, and to him he determined to entrust the perpetration of this horrible deed. When he received the order to put me to death, this faithful man, who was as much attached to me as to my brother, pretended to accede to it, but he laid his plans accordingly to save my life. On the night when the order was

to be executed, he managed to secrete me with so much skill, that he made my brother believe his orders had been obeyed; and some time after, having purposely secured to himself the possession of a wretched village in this neighbourhood, he conveyed me hither; and here have I passed my life unknown, and, thank God! forgotten."

The old man finished speaking; a long and affecting silence ensued, during which Amima pondered over such parts of the narrative as related to herself, and came to the conclusion that it must have been Sadek who had saved her life and brought her to her father. She saw that patience and resignation to her present fate were her only alternatives; and she determined from that moment to bid adieu to the world, to devote herself to her father, and to pass her time in imploring strength of mind from Heaven to meet whatever events might be reserved for her during the remainder of her days.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Magpies in sunshine, and courtiers in a king's ante-room.

PERSIAN SIMILE.

THE violence of feeling which had urged the Shah to the destruction of his niece, was succeeded by acts of unprecedented barbarity, as if he were anxious to stifle the feelings of remorse which the one had raised in his heart, by others still more atrocious. In losing Amima he had lost the only tie in which the affections of his heart were engaged; having once surmounted this, he overthrew every barrier, and like a wild beast breaking from his confinement, spread terror and alarm wherever his steps carried him. The first ravings of his fury turned towards the Khajeh Bashi. After this vile wretch had performed his hated office on the night of the poor maiden's expulsion from the harem, the

Shah ordered him to account for his conduct in having allowed the entrance of Zohrab within the sacred precincts of his trust, a task which he performed in so lame a manner, that he very soon after paid the forfeit of his negligence. This led to a total dissolution of the harem itself; for when it was known within the walls that their mistress and Princess was no more, the lamentations which were uttered by the women became so audible, accompanied by curses and execrations upon the author of the deed, that the Shah in his wrath ordered them to be sent away. Mariam, the unfortunate and heart-broken Mariam, seeing the hopeless state to which she was reduced, and the dangers which she run by remaining at her post, fled and concealed herself in the house of an obscure relation in one of the neighbouring villages. Of the other women, some were sent as presents to the chief officers about the court, others were treated with violence, and barbarously put to death, and the old ones turned out to die and to starve.

The public attention during these horrors was much diverted by the vigorous preparations which were making for an invasion of Mazanderan, and for the siege of Asterabad. As much as the cruelty and tyranny of the Shah were conspicuous in matters where his passions were roused, so did he shine where intelligence and activity were required. It was in the field, in the dangers of warfare, and in the conduct of a campaign, that his good qualities were brought into action. Vigilant in the extreme, his prudence and foresight were unabated; his sagacious mind could seize at once upon the whole bearings of a question, and when once he had made up his mind how to act, to that point he applied his extraordinary energies. He had been so worked upon by mortification of having been outwitted, and by disappointment at the destruction of his plan of policy in what related to the administration of the Caspian provinces of his empire, that he was determined fully to restore himself in his own eyes, as well as in those of the public, to the situation which he conceived he had lost. His revenge impelled him on the one hand, his ambition on the other; he determined that nothing short of the total and entire destruction of Zaul Khan, his son, and his whole family, should make him desist from his enterprise; whilst he expected, as his reward, to enter into full possession of those

countries and the city which were now opposed to him, as well as to become the lord paramount of the numerous tribes of Turcomans who inhabited the great plains of Kipchak.

In Persia a bastinado is not a disgrace; a prime vizir and a secretary of state may incur it, and return with all possible dignity to their posts. It was so with the general commanding the king's guards, bearing the title of Serdar, and the executioner in chief. The former was destined to be one of the principal officers in this expedition; he was much esteemed by the Shah for his bravery and activity, had served in all his wars, and had been instrumental, by his zeal and fidelity, in securing to his master many of the conquests which he had achieved. The other was also esteemed a most efficient officer in war, and particularly in predatory expeditions; for, although proverbially a coward, yet he was so full of resource, so ingenious in laying a country under contribution during the passage of the army, feeding them and enriching himself, that the Shah could not proceed without his services. The other officers to be employed, were Ismael Khan, a Georgian, the chief of the gholams; Mohammed Hussein Khan, *zamburekchi bashi*, the commander of the camel artillery; Asker Khan, *torchi bashi*, in command of the artillery; besides many others, among whom we must not forget our friend Shir Khan Beg, who, although only a gholam shahi, yet was esteemed one of superior pretensions to the rest of that body, and was selected on this occasion, as likely to be of great use to the army from his knowledge, real or presumed, of the country and city about to be invaded.

It was the custom for most of these personages, previous to the great selam of the day, to meet in the small room of the chief executioner, situated immediately opposite the principal gate of the Ark. On this occasion, when the exhibition to Asterabad was declared, and the chiefs who were to be employed had received the notification of their appointment, those we have already mentioned were present, and were soon in anxious discussion as to the nature of the expedition and the probability of its results.

"The king has done well, *mashallah!*" exclaimed the chief executioner; "these dogs' sons of Asterabidis would have thought themselves something if we did not go to burn their fathers. It is long since I have smelt gunpowder."

"Yes," said the *Serdar*, "in truth he has done well; however, the undertaking will not be so easy as we imagine. In the jungles of Mazanderan we must put our trust in God! and those dogs of Turcomans are such devils, that they take a man's head off before he can say, *ya Hussein!*!"

"Let them go to Jehanum," said the boaster; "what is jungle? what are Turcomans? the first, trees and bushes; the second, men like ourselves. What is all that to the king in person? The Shah! the Shah, after all! His strength, his thought, his cruelty, his courage, what are all the Asterabadis, your Zauls, your Zohrabs, and your cows of Turcomans, when opposed to him? They will be like flies before the sweeping of the storm."

"Zaul Khan, however much of a dog he may be, and however we may despise him," said the *Serdar*, "has lately afforded us such a specimen of what he can do, that we may be certain it will not be so easy a task as we imagine to take his city. Is it not so?" said the *Serdar*, addressing himself to Shir Khan Beg. "You were there lately, and know what sort of place it is."

"*Ars mi kunum!* I will beg leave to explain," said the Beg, setting himself well upon his perpendicular, in order to exhibit the tapering form of his waist; "I was there some time, and, praise be to God! as I do not walk about with my eyes shut, and, as in truth the Shah does not make use of fools for his servants, I saw many things. I saw their castle, I saw their towers, their ditch, and their drawbridge. I saw themselves, may their livers descend! and their guns, and their muskets, and every thing that they have——*Bah, bah, bah!*" said he, exulting, "I have seen many things."

"Well," said the *Serdar*, "there is no harm in that; but give me an answer—what sort of a place is Asterabad? Since you have seen, you can explain."

"It is not at all a bad place," said the gholam; "by your head, and by the salt of the Shah, it is no bad place! their walls are strong; they keep such a good look out from their turret tops that, may their fathers be burnt! I, even I could not approach without their asking me why I came, and whence I came; but I gave them their answer; they won't forget the gholam shahi for many a long year."

"Is it not a lie," said the chief executioner, in an inquiring though anxious tone, "that a man with a gun sits day and night behind every tree, and kills every man he sees without knowing how to miss?"

"What words are these?" said the Beg, happy to have an opportunity to tease the man of blows; "behind every tree? rather say, behind every leaf. The woods are there as thick as the wool on your cap. You can neither see the earth nor the sky for them; it is utter darkness; one gropes about. If I had not had the eyes of a lynx—mine are peculiar eyes—not like other men's eyes—I can see where a cat cannot. If I had not had these eyes where should I have been? where would have been the Shah's business? but, *mashallah!* I saw through them all; if you want eyes look at mine."

"But you escaped," said the chief executioner, "notwithstanding these concealed men?"

"Leave me alone for escaping," said the Beg, "'twas these very eyes that were of use. You, Khan, would not escape—by your soul, you would not. With my eyes about me, whose dog is he who would venture to take Sir Khan?"

Ismael Khan, the Georgian, a man of an uncommonly fine person, who commanded the whole of the gholams, a body not equalled in Asia, either for the men of which it was composed, or the horses which they bestrode, smiled at the vapouring of the Beg, as well as the fear which his words produced in the chief executioner, and emitting one long thin vapour of smoke into the apartment, which he had just drawn from his gold enamelled kalioun, said—"Mashallah, Shir Khan Beg, you have seen and done wonderful things in Mazanderan during your short stay in it. We must send you ahead of the army with some of our picked gholams."

"Yes, yes," said the chief executioner, "and drive all those men without saints from behind the trees. Give me the open plain, with a spear in my hand, and a good Turcomani horse under me, and then, let what will happen, I am there."

"Upon my eyes be it," said the Beg, very unconcernedly twisting the ringlets behind his ears, "I am ready. But cavalry is of no use in that unblessed country. However good a rider a man may be, and in truth I am not an indifferent one, cavalry is useless. My horsemanship is celebrated; I have ridden the

father and grandfather of every horse, from the plains of Nejd to those bred in the mountains of Circassia—what more do you want? I am one of those who can ride quite differently from other men. I—”

“ In truth, Sir Khan Beg is a good rider,” said Ismael Khan; “ but say, is not Zaul Khan, and Mustapha his brother, the Turcoman deputies, are not they better? Whatever the meh-mander tried to do, they did better.”

Upon this there was a laugh all round, sorely at the expense of the conceited Beg, who, however, being rather accustomed to this species of railery, calmly adjusted his beard, gave a rub upwards to his eyebrows, and called for his kalion.

Resuming the conversation, the Serdar said—“ But if cavalry will not do, we must throw our *tuffenkchis*, our musketeers, in advance, and destroy every lurking ambush that may be in wait for us.”

“ You say well,” exclaimed the chief executioner, as if he were delighted with this thought; “ first let the woods be cleared by the musketeers, and then we on horseback will follow sword in hand. Praise be to God, you said well.”

The Zamburekchi Bashi was a short crabbed looking old man; his head large; his back rather inclined to hump, and like one of the camels upon which his small iron guns were mounted, sat for a long time in utter repose, quietly chewing the cud of such reflections as might chance to pass through his brain. At length he said—“ After all a *zamburek* is something. It has burnt the fathers of the Moscovites, why should it not those of the Asterabadis and the Turcomans? Let the Shah only give me an order to take my camels, my gunners, and my fire amongst them, and, jungle or no jungle, I will drive all life out of their heads.”

“ Man!” said the Serdar, “ who ever heard of a *zamburek* in Mazanderan! you might as well talk of devils in Paradise. In the first place, your camels could not make five steps without falling, so slippery and mountainous is the soil, and lucky would you think yourself if they did not all split up in twain like a criminal who has undergone the *shekkeh*. ”*

* The *shekkeh* is a punishment common in Persia, by which a criminal is tied by the legs to two posts, with his head downwards, and then cut into two equal parts.

" My camels are not made for splitting up," said the old general of camel artillery, with some warmth, " my camels are made for fighting. Did they not scare the Chirkes, the Abkhas, and the Lesgies—not to mention the Russians—out of their wits when the Shah last marched into Georgia. We threw balls at them with such an aim that we made their fathers dance out of their graves, and made all their old women cry *Aman!* and see, has not the Shah allowed me to wear a *jika* on my cap, and a jewelled dagger to my waist, for having hit an ass a parasang off? What words are these, O Serdar! Mohammed Hussein is no such fool either, not to know what he says. Why then shall we not strike these ragged Turcomans, and those less than curs of Asterabadis."

" Camels are good things, and iron guns are good things too," said the Serdar, " and *mashallah!* praise be to God, the Shah cannot boast of such another good servant as Mohammed Hussein Khan; but neither his bravery, nor his camels, nor his guns, can make a wet soil dry, nor a mountain a plain, nor can he give hoofs to his camels, or prevent them from splitting when their legs part asunder. Is it not so, Shir Khan Beg; you, who know those countries?"

The Beg, who had puffed away the little check which had been put to his boasting, again called upon to give his opinion, answered the Serdar, although he looked at the Zamburekchi Bashi, with a most self-complacent air, saying—" What words are these? What fool is there who does not know that camels split up in Mazanderan? I, even I, man as I am, nearly split up myself as I walked over some of their unsainted hills. But I walk in such a manner, different from any body else, that with God's help nothing happened to me;—but, oh, help in Allah! you ought to have seen the horses and the mules how they rolled about. There is the famous Sanduk pass, which we must all go through, where as sure as asses are not mules, and mules not horses, every one of your camels must split in two, and unless the halves can get up and walk on by themselves, you must leave your guns on the ground, and say *Allah akbar*, God is great! *wallah, billah!* By Allah, I say true—if I tell a lie, cut off my head for my pains."

" And so," said the Zamburekchi Bashi, anger rising into his face, " by your account the Shah must be an ass, his Grand Vizir

must be an ass, and Mohammed Hussein Khan must be an ass, whilst Shir Khan Beg, *mashallah*, alone must be the lord of wit and the lord of knowledge. Go, go; I spit upon such wit and such knowledge."

The old man, whose chief associates were his camels and their drivers, and his gunners, was expected when he spoke to be coarse, therefore his speeches never gave the offence they would have done had they come from the mouth of a more refined person; but, as nothing could convince him that camels did split in Mazanderan, his companions for the present left him to his obstinacy.

"The Khan speaks well," said the chief executioner. "The Shah, who has made war in every region in the world, who was bred and born in Mazanderan, who knows what zambureks are as well as a mollah knows his *fatheh*, and who has seen more camels than our astronomers stars,—the Shah—may the blessed Prophet take him into his holy keeping! the Shah, I say, has ordered the zambureks to be in readiness. Why throw more words into the air? Whose dogs are we to say 'nay' when he says 'yea'?—besides, hear my words—if a camel splits, does it follow that it becomes dust? No; it immediately becomes food; it becomes *kabob*, roast meat, and so much is saved to the public treasury."

"Well have you said," remarked Asker Khan, the commander of the field artillery, a renegade Frank, who had once been a Cuba pirate, afterwards a doctor in the service of an Indian nabob, then captain of an Arabian ship, and lastly general of artillery to the Shah. "Camel beef is no bad thing when you can get none other. I myself have eaten, in the new world, lion steaks done on a fire of flowing lava, and seasoned with gunpowder!"

"Indeed!" said all the assembled guests, who, like their countrymen, were always ready to believe any story, however monstrous, about the new world. *Walla!* by Allah! are there lions in the new world?" inquired one. "Does fire, then, always come from the earth?" said another. "Is all the roast meat in the new world made of lion's flesh?" said a third.

"It's all made of lion's flesh," said Asker Khan, "when it's not made of alligator;" speaking in a language which was meant to pass for Persian, but which was a farago of English, Persian,

Arabic, and Hindooostani words, and so far comprehensible that his auditors interpreted it each after his own fashion. The extraordinary accounts which this personage gave of himself even exceeded the habitual exaggeration of the Persians, but his prowess was so great that he made his words respected and even believed, whilst his knowledge of gunnery, which amounted to little more than to point a carronade from the quarter deck, made him pass for a miracle of science.

"Is it true," said the chief executioner, "that in the new world Jews have tails?"

"I never saw them," said the Frank Khan, "but I believe it; because I know that in a country called Guatimalo, there is a set of men who wear large bags behind, which serve them for pockets."

"Ah!" said the Serdar, not in the least disbelieving the fact, "like the animal which was once brought to Shah Seffi, having a pouch in front where it carried its young."

"Just so," cried the general of camel artillery, "that must be true, for our camels wear inside pockets, where they carry food and water for a week:—it is plain that animals have their inside as well as their outside pockets."

"Wonderful are the works of Allah!" exclaimed the Serdar.

"What are these things to what I have seen?" said Shir Khan Beg, as if he were oppressed by the invention of some great lie, of which he seemed anxious to be delivered; "I have seen the hole in Mazanderan in which Rustam thrust the Dive Sefid after he had almost killed him, and then stifled him by throwing in a whole army, men and horse, which he first slew and then threw upon him. Talking of pockets, nothing was ever like this hole. When I see a thing, it is not like things which other men see. My things are worth seeing."

The renegade, who, although he had long known and been accustomed to the vapourings of the conceited Beg, could never refrain from disconcerting him whenever he was able; but on this occasion, being anxious to acquire some information upon the sort of country through which he would have to drag his train of artillery, said—"I fear, Sir Beg, that if there be such large holes in that country, we shall have some difficulty in taking our guns across it."

"What guns? what artillery?" said Shir Khan. "It will be

well if we can take ourselves through the country. There is not a road large enough for a cat throughout the whole of Mazanderan; how then can you drag a gun? There is one mountain down which your guns would go well enough, by placing them at the top and letting them run to the bottom. But that is my way—I always have a way different from other men's ways. Other men would have a hundred peasants to drag the guns, besides oxen and horses. Now letting them run alone is my way."

"Tis true," said the chief executioner, who acted as a sort of commissary for the army, "that the passage of artillery through Persia is attended with many inconveniences; sometimes the guns come to a full stop for several days; for where the inhabitants of a village hear that artillery is likely to pass through their district, they take to the mountains, abandoning their houses, and do not return till it has passed, lest they should be seized to drag it forward. If the road were all down hill, then the Beg's plan would not be a bad one; but the gun can't run up hill, nor along the plains, without the help of peasants."

"The report spread abroad among the enemy that artillery accompanies the Shah," said the Serdar, "is frequently sufficient of itself to quell a rebellion, and to bring the disaffected to the Shah's stirrup. For that reason we must take our guns with us, and Asker Khan will get every help he requires. In your country, Sir Khan," said he to the commander of artillery, "how many peasants do you generally harness to a gun?"

"*Allah, allah!*" cried the renegade; "my country is full of strange men and stranger customs. Peasants harnessed, indeed! they would pull the king's palace about his ears if he ventured to order them to do what they did not like."

"Then your kings must be sorry folk indeed," exclaimed the Zamburekchi Bashi. "Look at ours—there's a true Shah—*bah, bah, bah!*—none ever cut off men's heads like him."

"Nor beat men on the feet like him," said Asker Khan, significantly looking at the three present, who had recently undergone that infliction.

"That is a stroke of *takdeer*, destiny," said the chief executioner, "which must happen every where. I dare say that your vizirs, and your secretaries of state, and your chief execu-

tioners, are persecuted by *takdeer* as much as ours, get as many bastinados, eat as much occasional punishment, and rub their foreheads on the royal threshold as well as we. Bastinado here is nothing. I have eaten my blows, and I only get up and say, ‘ May your shadow never be less.’ What more do you want?”

In this manner did they converse, discussing every thing that came before them with the greatest freedom. In a country like Persia, where lying is not esteemed a vice, the man whose abuse of the king may be repeated, and reach the sovereign’s ear, has always the resource of denying his own words, and from long experience, finding that one man’s word is as little worth as that of another, the king himself finishes by never believing either side of the question. Aga Mohamed in this respect was as liberal as a person in his situation could be, he seldom vexed his subjects for their opinions—all he required was unbounded submission. He rarely lent his ear to reports of things said of him, of scandal, or of malignant hints—such men he always reprobred, and even punished; therefore it was not easy to govern him except by facts, and although his nature was suspicious, yet that suspicion was only to be roused by his own observation. He had learned by long experience how totally his own countrymen were to be disbelieved in all they said. He found the simplest mode of equalizing justice, in cases of complaints and quarrels amongst his officers and ministers, was to inflict punishment on both parties, a system which tended to diminish his own annoyance, although it increased the national duplicity.

The above recited conversation was in its fullest vigour, when the announcement of the Shah’s being about to take his seat on the throne at the selam, was heard in all parts of the Ark, and the parties assembled immediately broke up in haste to appear in their respective places before their sovereign. It was always an awful moment; for in the presence of the tyrant, who could say that his turn for destruction might not be the next upon the book of fate?

As soon as the king was seated, he took this opportunity of addressing himself long and loudly to his prime vizir, Miaza Hajji Ibrahim, in order thereby to show the world, that in the recent deadly events he had arisen blameless, and that the con-

fidence reposed in him had not in the slightest degree diminished.

The Shah now openly talked of his views upon Asterabad, and himself investigated, with the most scrupulous detail, every thing that related to the arrangement of the expedition. He inspected arms, gave his opinion upon clothing and horses and equipages; issued directions for provisions, and for the establishment of the Ordou Bazar, or camp market. He talked to Ismael Khan upon the equipment of his gholams, to the Serdar concerning his corps of musketeers, to the renegade of guns, and to the general of camel artillery touching his *zambureks*. His sagacity awed almost as much as his cruelty. Every one felt that, under the scrutiny of such an eye and such a mind, to do one's duty was inevitable, and therefore none flinched, but went heartily to work in its accomplishment. At the breaking up of the selam, the whole town soon rang with the activity, the excitement, and the anxieties of war, and in the general din was forgotten the individual misery produced by the late events. There was one order above all others which produced a great sensation, namely, that no woman upon pain of death should be admitted to join the camp. This injunction set loose every female tongue, from the lowest drudge in the harem to the khanum on her musnud, and the Shah, his cruelties, and the murder of his niece, were subjects which occupied every mind as they excited every execration. Although the inhabitants of the anderoon were in general pleased to be left behind, yet the fact of there being a prohibition, sufficed to set every woman in opposition thereto. Never was the perversity of nature's fairer half, so self-evident as upon the proclamation of this order.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

It would be easier to change the Kebek than the resolves of a wilful woman.

THE HAREM.

We must now return to Zulma, who, by the escape of Zohrab and its consequent events had been kept in a constant state of deadly apprehension, lest, owing to the part which she unwittingly had taken in it, she might have been added to one of the many sacrificed on this occasion. She felt that she owed her safety principally to the ingenuity of the humpback, who being himself deeply implicated in all her intrigues, had left nothing undone which falsehood and ability might compass, to keep himself clear of danger—and he had succeeded. The Shah continued to confide in him, and so useful and necessary had he rendered himself to the tyrant, that even where suspicion fell upon him, it did little more than glance, such would have been the inconvenience of finding him guilty.

The bastinado which had been inflicted upon the chief executioner, was scarcely felt as a family misfortune; for so common were punishments of all descriptions during the reign of the present sovereign, that scarcely a house was there in the city which did not occasionally hear within its walls the moanings of bodily pain, or lamentations for the death of a relative; nor had even Zulma found relief from the supposed death of her rival; for, lost as Zohrab was to them both, she now deplored, in common with the rest of the people, the destruction of one who was ever the refuge of the miserable, and a barrier to the overwhelming despotism which now oppressed them. It was only when she heard the Shah's order promulgated—his positive order that no woman should be allowed to follow the camp, that all the perverseness of her sex was revealed, and she determined, happen what would, to disobey it and go. Her love for Zohrab was roused;—she anticipated the moment when

she might be of use and comfort to him, should he be unfortunate enough to fall into the Shah's hand—perhaps even save his life—and now that her rival was no more, she felt confident that his heart would no longer turn from her. Then feelings of ambition dawned in her mind : “Who knows,” thought she, “what influence such a woman as I may not acquire over the king! Wretch, and much to be pitied as he is, habit is every thing, and he will feel the necessity of a female confidant. Why should Zulma not take the place of Amima!”

Awakened and fired by these thoughts, she could not rest until she had communicated them to her chief adviser the humpback, whom, notwithstanding in the main she despised, yet was he so useful to her, that she could take no step without his advice. He exercised as much sway over her father as he did over the Shah himself: and although Zulma scarcely wanted his assistance in the first instance, inasmuch as she acted entirely without control in the paternal mansion, still his word was always certain to produce its due effect upon occasions of emergency; besides he always brought with him that look of mystery, which induced whisperings and gadding in corners, so dear to women in general, and particularly so congenial to the atmosphere of a chief executioner's house.

“And so,” she said, as soon as he appeared, “women are prohibited from going with the army?”

“They are, my soul,” said the crafty deformity, with his usual smile; “not one is to go. The Shah gave the order this day at the selam; not one goes.”

“So be it,” said Zulma, with a forced expression of resignation on her face: “So be it—the Shah is free to do whatever he pleases in his own dominions, with either his male or female subjects; but withal this, he is mistaken, and—I go—”

“You! How, and by what means? Heaven forbid!”

“I go, happen what will,” she repeated; “upon that make your mind easy.”

“It cannot be,” said the humpback; “you know the Shah is not to be trifled with, and particularly in his present mood. As is there but one Allah, I approach his head with a caution and a silence which makes my blood run cold when I think of it, and when I do handle it, it is with the same fear that a man touches a bomb-shell, lest it should go off and blow him to ten

thousand atoms. Once I thought you the mistress of wisdom, the owner of penetration, now you will make me suppose you a candidate for madness."

"What words are these," exclaimed the maiden, "you yourself must be mad, not to see that what I propose is nothing less than wisdom. Is Zulma to be lost for ever?—immured within the walls of a hated anderoon, with nothing to do but to puff the smoke of her kalioun from her mouth, chasing it with her eye until it be lost in air?—to talk with none but gossiping dames and idle girls, and have no higher ambition in lifethan to see that her father's ferashes perform their duty? Do not you perceive that there is a Shah to be won, and an empire to be governed? That he who has lost one tie in life, as necessary to him as the air he breathes, will require another; and that a Princess's place is vacant, surrounded though it be by danger? Go to, thou art the candidate for madness, if thy eyes cannot see these things!"

The humpback, to whose understanding such flights of imaginative eminence had not yet reached, opened all his eyes as he heard the words of his companion pour from her mouth; and new schemes of ambition very soon formed themselves in his mind. He immediately felt that, Amima being no more, the reign of his rival Sadek in the Shah's good graces might easily be brought to a close, and should it ever happen that Zulma became a royal banou, he would stand a good chance of leaving his razor to wield the pen. The head which was now employed in small intrigues, he soothed himself by hoping might ere long be engaged in conducting affairs of state.

But the more he pondered on these things, the more he foresaw how difficult it would be to put Zulma's scheme into execution of accompanying the camp; and he loudly disclaimed any intention on his part of proposing it to his royal master.

"Allah, Allah!" he cried out, "to ask such a favour of the Shah is, in other words, to ask for the bastinado; I am not the man to undertake any thing so dangerous. Besides, you are not my daughter, 'tis your father's duty to ask: persuade him to make the supplication."

"No wheat will spring up unless the soil be well sunned," said Zulma; "what good was ever gained without some risk? But you say right, it is not your business; it shall be my father's,

unless he too fears a second bastinado ; let us send for him." Upon which she ordered one of the slaves in the court-yard to seek her father, and require his presence, a practice which, although against every rule of respect and decorum between a child and its parent, she never hesitated to adopt.

He came at her bidding, and no sooner was he arrived, than having recourse to her most coaxing arts, and throwing all the persuasion she was able into the tone of her voice, she explained the reasons why she wished to accompany the camp, asserting that it was solely to watch over his safety, and finished by entreating him to secure the Shah's permission to that effect.

"Are you mad," said he, "or do you wish to kill your father? Have I not already eaten more stick than falls to one man's share, and do you require me to undergo the punishment again merely to advance your whim?"

"*Astaferallah, heaven forbid!*" she exclaimed, "but the king surely can never be angry because his subjects claim the privilege of being of use. Only ask, and should he refuse there is no harm done."

"Only take the lion by the tooth, and if he does not bite, there is no harm done, you might as well say. *Allah, Allah!*" exclaimed the ruffled chief executioner, at the request made him by his daughter.

"Grant but this to your daughter," said she, "and I ask no more. The Goozoo says that there can be no harm in going before the Shah upon this errand, therefore why should you hesitate?"

"Does he say so, indeed?" said her father.

"Your slave said," replied the humpback, "that it would be well if the Lady Zulma were to go. We want all the wise heads in the country to oppose those *shaitans* of Asterabadis."

"There," said the animated maiden raising her voice, "did I not say so! Now go, if you do not wish to see your daughter dead before you, go!"

"Tis well in the Goozoo to say this," said the unwilling father, "he has not eaten stick."

"That time has gone by," said the humpback; "the king has had enough of punishment for some while; he has taken to moderation, and he smokes the kalioun of quiet. There is no harm in him now."

After much additional persuasion, in which the daughter made use of all her entreaties, and the humpback his craft, the weak man consented to go, and with unwilling steps bent his way towards the palace. When he got there he found that the Shah had been for some time in his *khelvet*, his closet, in close conference with his Prime Vizir. He therefore determined to wait without until the Vizir should be dismissed, his heart misgiving him all the while, and his tongue seeking with fear and trembling for the words with which he should bring forward his request.

We must there leave him, in order to inform our readers of what took place at this conference, in which many schemes of public policy were discussing.

The Shah, after the fatal catastrophe which had taken place in his house, by which we mean the destruction of his niece, became anxious, whenever it reached the ears of her brother, Fattak Ali Mirza, the then Governor of Fars, that it should not affect his loyalty. He heard that no prince had ever rendered himself so popular to the Shirazis, since the days of Kerim Khan, and he was fearful lest, in the excitement of his rage upon hearing the death of his beloved sister, he might throw himself into open rebellion. Upon this, the first order which the Shah issued to the Grand Vizir at this conference, without giving any reason for so doing, was the recall of the Prince Fattak Ali from his government.

"Hajji," said the Shah, "let a *rakm* to our nephew at Shiraz be immediately despatched; the courier must use all speed; on his head be it! Let our orders be implicit and peremptory that the Prince, upon the receipt of it, instantly leaves Shiraz, and *chappari*, with the haste of a courier, join our royal stirrup in Mazanderan."

The Vizir knew too well the temper of his master, when he issued such an order, to reply any words but "*Be cheshm, upon my eyes be it!*" He would have made a remonstrance had he seen it fitting, for the Prince was one of his greatest favourites. In the conduct which he had held during his government of the city and province intrusted to his care, he had shown great wisdom and moderation. Every report which he received from the south, spoke of the prosperity, the quiet, the improving wealth and population of Fars and the

adjacent country; and much did he fear, lest in robbing the state of so good a servant as the young prince, the usual consequences of the rapine and exactions of inferior officers would destroy all the good that had been effected. However, in this instance he was obliged to obey, and instantly seating himself before the Shah, with his own hand he wrote the order, applied the royal seal, and dispatched it with the necessary injunctions to the courier to use all speed.

The Shah then led to the discussion of the affairs of Astarabad.

"It is evident," said he, "that Zaul Khan is a person not to be despised. We have seen the extraordinary ingenuity which he displayed in withdrawing his son from our power; we have seen the judicious manner in which he combined the evasion of the deputies with his own escape, and their return, unhurt, and unmolested, to their fastnesses. He has literally taken the cap from off our head; he is an enemy not to be despised. However the Shah may trust to the bravery of his troops, yet in this expedition bravery goes for less than skill; and as we know that the greatest skill will be opposed to us, so it behoves us also to exert our utmost ingenuity in foreseeing every thing, and providing for every thing. The Shah requires the aid of your understanding; have you made any thought by which he may receive benefit?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said the Vizir, "it has struck your slave that we must devise some means of communicating with those of your Majesty's subjects, who do not participate in the rebellious spirit of the governor of Astarabad, and who look to the coming of your victorious troops, as a moment of deliverance from oppression. Such we know there are; upon one in particular your slave knows dependence is to be placed."

"*Barikallah*, you say well! praise be to God, your thought is in unison with the Shah's. We know that the Mollahs and the priesthood are with us; they hate the *sunni* Turcomans, and esteem an alliance with them as unlawful and impure. Firmans must be addressed to them. But who is the one man, whom you say we can depend upon?"

"May I be your sacrifice," answered Hajji Ibrahim, "it is one Shireen Ali, the Mirza or scribe to Zaul Khan, a Shirazi, a man of considerable talent, a great penman and learned; your

slave has known him long, and has ascertained to a certainty, that he goes with us, and that he looks to the coming of your majesty as the Jews do to that of their prophet. When your majesty's slave, the Gholam Shir Khan Beg was at Asterabad, he saw enough of this man to ascertain that he was ready to do any thing to serve your majesty; he has already frequently received the proper *rishweh*, manure or bribe, and now let us hope to see the fruits of it."

"It will be proper," said the Shah, thoughtfully, "to communicate with this man instantly, and to establish a correspondence with him."

"Perhaps," said the Vizir, "it would be the wish of the asylum of the universe to despatch Shir Khan Beg again, with orders to make his way into Asterabad itself if possible, and there disseminate the proper firmans, by which the well-inclined might ascertain how favourably the Shah is disposed towards them, and thus secure a co-operation against the present governors; and also, he might have a conference with the Mirza, and settle some plan of communication beneficial to your majesty's arms, and to the ultimate object of the expedition."

"You do not say ill," said the Shah, "let us see this Shir Khan. I know his merits; he is a *foozool* and a coxcomb; but he is active and brave, and no bad youth. Send for him."

As soon as the name of Shir Khan Beg was called upon, among the numerous courtiers and officers who plied at the royal gate, the eyes of all were turned towards him, as one destined to receive a further infliction of punishment. He himself turned pale, and was speechless; he slowly arose, followed the messenger, forgetting even to give his cap a new pinch, or his shawl a more graceful adjustment. When he came to the small low door which led into the *khelvet*, he could scarcely stand, so truly was he terrified (in common let it be said with all the Persians of his day) by merely knowing himself to be near the presence of the Shah. He made his proper bow, and left his shoes at the door. As soon as the Shah perceived him, he said in a milder tone than usual, which gave courage to the faltering man, "*Biah pish*, come forward!" upon which he immediately resumed a sufficient portion of his self-assurance to put him in possession of his wits, and approached, standing on the brink of the basin of water, making

one of his lowest inclinations, although in so doing he did not forget one of those characteristic vibrations of his hips, which indicated the repossession of his natural assurance.

" You were at Asteraabed," said the Shah ; " was it not so ? "

" As I am your less than the least," said the Beg, " I was."

" What did you hear of the state of public opinion there ? How much in favour of the Shah, how much in favour of the rebels ? "

" As I am your slave," said the Beg, quite himself again, " your slave saw and heard many things there ; your slave said to himself, ' This is the time for prudence ; open eyes and ears, but shut the mouth.' "

" Well," said the Shah, " never mind what you said to yourself, what did others say to you ? "

" Your slave heard that most of the *Ulema* looked upon the Turoomans as dirt ; and only required the presence of the asylums of the universe to send them and their friends, by the blessing of the prophet, to Jehanum ! Your slave heard this, by the salt of the Shah, he heard this ! By the Shah's head, he has a way of hearing things different from other people ! "

" Be silent," said the Vizir in a suppressed tone, " speak to the purpose, and cease being a *foozoot*, an officious prater."

" And who was the man amongst them most likely to be of use to the Shah's government ? " said the king ; " such a man you saw ? "

" As I am your sacrifice," said the Beg, " a bankrupt Mirza was there ; a fellow who would have taken any thing, even as low as a cucumber, for a bribe ; who said this and that, and that and this ; who made promises as thick as the trees in the forest ; who swore quicker than any Shirazi ever talked ; and told more lies in a minute than your slave could tell *a tafexalla ha* in an hour. Your slave, who knows the value of such men better than any one, thinks he might be turned to a good account for the Shah's service."

The Shah's face curled up into a malignant smile at hearing this speech from the Beg, as he glanced his eye at the Prime Vizir, who was himself a Shirazi, and who seemed to wince at this account given after the eulogiums which he himself had made of the individual ; but, however, his good temper never forsook him for an instant, and he allowed this little check to his dignity to pass unnoticed.

"Now, Sir Khan," said the Shah, "do you think that firman might be introduced into Asterabad, announcing protection to the well-affected, and death to those who abetted the rebels?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said the Beg, "*chara*, why not? With wit and activity, every thing can be done."

"Then be you the man to do it. You are a good servant, the Shah knows you, you are a better gholam than a mehmander; you must forthwith set off, introduce yourself into Asterabad, and do all that you will be instructed to do. You shall have every help from the Shah, and should you perform this service well, the title of Khan awaits you, as also the right to wear a jewelled dagger."

At every word of his speech, the enraptured Beg grew taller and taller: his hips immediately felt the arrogant impulse, like horses on the fret anxious to be off; he could not resist giving a twist to his mustache, and as fast as the Shah landed, he bowed and bowed; until at length, upon the last promise of the jewelled dagger, he fairly went on his knees and kissed the ground.

"Your slave, who is less than the least," said the Beg, "will lay down his life for the Shah. Whatever happens he goes. If every tree in Mazanderan concealed a Turcoman, and every Turcoman presented a spear, he would fight his way through. Give your slave his instructions, and he will say *be cheshm* unto death. Whose dogs be they, who will dare to say aught to him, when he exhibits the royal rakan!"

In this manner did he go on, until he was almost black in the face with the explosions of flattery and professions of self-devotion that issued from his lips. At length he was stopped, and having been dismissed with the strictest injunctions of secrecy, he departed with such a feeling of elevation that the clouds of heaven seemed to hang too low for him.

As he appeared again among his friends at the *derakhoneh*, at the royal gate, the swagger of this self-important personage was a thing which the Persians had still to learn. His tightened silk vest actually burst with the swelling of his inward pride. He walked as if "khan" were written upon every step, and his nether person vibrated so intensely, that he conceived the jewels and the dagger were actually in his girdle. No one could conceive by what rapid operation he had thus been acted upon, for he

seemed to have been as quickly inflated by a new infusion of vanity as ever a balloon was by rarefied air.

One of the persons who met the Beg upon his exit was the chief executioner, who observing the expansion of his looks and the appearance of joy spread over his whole person, and who had been pondering over the disagreeable task which had been imposed upon him, now took courage, and determined to make his daughter's request known.

"God's pity was upon you!" said the chief executioner.—"We thought that the countenance of the Shah was again turned against you, and that there was more work for the *feleh*."

"Are men mad," said Shir Khan Beg, "that they cannot see a person go before the Shah, without thinking that he must of necessity be going to receive punishment? Cannot they also sometimes think that he may be going to receive reward?" said he, pressing his shawl down, admiring his waist, and casting a look of delight over his whole person. "The Shah treats me in a peculiar way—he does not treat me like other men. The Shah is one who knows his man—he distinguishes a good servant from a bad one."

"How sits his humour to-day," said the anxious Khan; "can he be spoken to?"

"Some men may speak to him, others not," said the Beg; "it depends upon the person—some are fools, and some are wise. It is now two hours that we have been conversing together; let every man judge for himself."

Upon this he left the chief executioner to speculate upon what might have befallen the Beg, who seemed to look upon all others as less than the dust of the field, and moreover to settle in his own mind what steps he would pursue in order to put into execution the wishes of his daughter.

When the Shah broke up the conference with his Vizir, he issued from his private apartments to transact business at the public selam, and thither the chief executioner awaited him.—Occupying his usual post at the ceremonial, he anxiously studied the lines in the Shah's face, in order to discover whether they might be propitious to his undertaking or not, as a pilot will study the rippling on the surface of the water to ascertain whether the current which it denotes will bear him favourably into port.

The king, during the ceremony, called aloud to him to inquire who had gone forward to provide provisions for the camp during its stay at Firouzkoh, when the Khan, in a fit of absence, only engaged with the one object of his thoughts, answered, "As I am your sacrifice, my daughter," to the utter astonishment of every one present, and still more to the surprise of the king himself, who exclaimed, "O little man, are ye turned mad? Did he say his daughter, or are our senses deranged?"

The wretched executioner, upon being convicted of this mistake, regained his self-possession, for now he lost sight of the object which he had in view, and said, "As I am your sacrifice your slave has spoken ill, his ears have been mistaken." He then answered the king's question to his satisfaction, but he left the presence fully resolved not to risk his own safety by asking that for his daughter which he knew would not fail to overwhelm him with confusion.

At the breaking up of the selam, he returned home, but was in no hurry to encounter his impatient and wilful daughter, who, thwarted as she would be in her expectation, he felt would exhibit one of those violent paroxysms of temper so common to her. However, at length he did return, and informed her of his inability to perform her bidding. To his surprise he found her perfectly prepared for a disappointment, and when he had told the whole history of his morning's adventure she scarcely gave any signs of being displeased; but there was a dogged obstinacy in her manner which showed the woman, and which seemed to say, "Stay awhile, and you shall see."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A lame man has not always a lame story.

EASTERN PROVERB.

THE gentle reader may or may not have discovered that the mysterious person who received the wretched Amima at the

wicket gate of the Ark, and who deposited her with so much apparent cruelty and such extraordinary haste in the desert, was neither more nor less than Sadek, the Shah's confidential servant. He is a personage of too much consequence in this our narrative not to merit some more particular notice, and we entreat a few moments for the short history of his early and subsequent life.

He was a Georgian by birth. He was bought a slave when quite a child, by the father of the Shah, and had been brought up with him and his brother, acting as their slave, and identified with the family of his master after the manner of the east. He had more particularly attached himself to the fortunes of the Shah, although in fact he felt himself as much the servant of his brother. He was a man of peculiar character, unrelenting and firm of purpose, but kind and considerate in the main; possessing, under a stern expression of countenance, a tender and compassionate heart.

When the Shah had put out his brother's eyes, and had ordained his death, it was upon Sadek that he pitched for the perpetration of his horrible mandate, but the faithful and sagacious servant, who well knew the character of his master, whilst he bowed submission to the order, determined in his own mind that it should not be executed. He had secured to himself the lordship of a small and obscure village, situated on the borders of the Great Salt Desert; and precisely in the same manner in which he had preserved the daughter, so he had some years back the father, and installed him in the small tenement which we have already described as situated near that village. But with such sagacity and secrecy was this conducted, that none but himself was aware that the order had not been executed; and as he knew that his own life depended upon the secret being preserved, so every plan which he formed was always with the view to keep it from publicity. The miserable peasantry of the village, ignorant and barbarous as they were, knew that such a being existed, but who or what he was no one cared to inquire, and thus year succeeded year, leaving Hussein Kuli Khan in security and oblivion, cheering Sadek in the success of his scheme, and in the comfortable satisfaction of having saved the life of one to whom he was attached by so many ties.

As soon as the Shah informed him of his determination to

put his niece to death, and that he had selected him to do the deed, Sadek's mind was immediately made up to save the daughter as he had the father. He had been ordered to make away with her unknown to any one, but he was obliged to make an accomplice of the Khajeh Bashi, in order to draw her from the anderoon without exciting suspicion. He selected two of the Shah's fleetest horses, from among those kept in training to be used on emergencies, and, disguised as he was, performed the rapid journey in the manner we have already described. It being a matter of life and death, he could do no otherwise than steel his heart and shut his ears to the temporary pain which he knew must be inflicted upon his unfortunate charge, feeling that the quiet which would follow would soon restore her strength; and as it was necessary for him to re-appear before the Shah on the very next morning within a reasonable time, it became urgent to lose not a moment in depositing the maiden where he did, a feat of rapidity which none but horses such as they bestrode could have performed. In fact, he appeared before his master as usual, almost at the same hour in the morning at which he was accustomed to awake him; and in so doing he said not a word, but put on his accustomed, unmoved, and stern aspect. The Shah did not venture to ask a single question, trusting in the fidelity of his servant, and he remained satisfied, by the inflexible bearing of the man, that his orders had been but too faithfully executed. And thus for the moment ended the horrid tragedy.

In the state of things that followed he was more than ever interested that nothing should compromise his secrecy, and this circumstance made him more stern and silent than before. He was persecuted by his sister Mariam, who, in deplored her own miseries, was always most inquisitive about the fate of her mistress, and sometimes committed herself by acts of such imprudence, that she formed the torment of his existence. She was constantly expressing her desire to proceed to Asterabad to gain an asylum in the family of Zohrab, where she was certain of a welcome, and although Sadek saw that this scheme was in every way objectionable, yet rather than continue open to her indiscretions he at length ceded, and assured her that he would soon form some scheme for conducting her there in safety. The widow of the late chief huntsman, during the late events had

taken refuge in her old dwelling at Firouzkoh, together with her son, the attached servant of Zohrab, who thus had escaped unnoticed ; to her Sadek persuaded his sister to go, and when there, under the protection of the young though prudent Ali, he pointed out how easy it would be for them to make their way to Asterabad, particularly if the widow herself, to whom the whole of that country was well known, would accompany her. This scheme succeeded without the least suspicion being thrown upon any one, and after having threaded their way through the intricate forests, they were rewarded for their fatigues by reaching the gates of Asterabad in safety.

Vague reports of all the horrors which had taken place at Tehran, after the escape of Zohrab and his father, had reached Asterabad, but the death of the Princess was still unknown. Zohrab's mind, however, was a prey to constant and unceasing apprehension for her safety. The armlet, the fatal armlet, was ever before his eyes, and left him not a moment's peace. He revolved in his thoughts all the probabilities of its being found, and foresaw that if it fell into the hands of the humpback, an event most likely to happen, the dreaded discovery must take place; for being delivered to the Shah, it would tell its own most intelligible tale. He lived in apprehension of news from the capital ; his brave spirit was subdued by a thousand conflicting emotions, all tending to destroy that exertion which his country and friends now expected from him. He no longer in their eyes appeared the same person : instead of exhibiting that alacrity for which he had been so famous, he was thoughtful and uneasy, seeking solitude, and shunning whatever would otherwise have been full of attraction.

One morning, at the earliest dawn, he was awakened by what seemed to be the sobs and moanings of some person in distress : they were female lamentations ; he listened again and again, and still the sounds were repeated, and even appeared to increase. He called to his servant, who slept without, to go see what was the matter. He soon returned, saying that two strange women, accompanied by a Persian youth, had taken possession of the entrance of the principal gate, had there established themselves ; that the women were crying most piteously, the cry of death, and were calling upon the name of Zohrab Khan to come to their relief. In spite of every remonstrance,

nothing could persuade them to desist. Zohrab, whose mind was prepared to receive intelligence subversive of all hope for Amima's safety, started up, struck with conviction that every apprehension was realised; a deadly paleness came over him, cold sweat ran down his forehead, and his limbs could scarcely support him, when, with a dress loosely thrown over his person, he followed his servant to the gate. There he immediately recognized his faithful Ali, who rushed to kiss his hand, and to throw himself at his feet. But who are the women? thought he. Ali's mother also seized his hand and kissed it, and he recognized her without any difficulty; but the other woman remained closely veiled, increasing her cries and lamentations.

"Who are you? in the name of Allah!" said Zohrab, not having recognized Mariam. "Speak—why do you cry thus? what is the cause of your grief?"

"Oh my master!" said the boy, "we have brought bad news the Lady Amima—" It was not necessary for him to finish the phrase—the stricken youth heard the words, covered his face with his hands and fled to his apartment as if he expected there to meet the spirit of his departed love.

The scene of woe which followed this disclosure is not to be described. We must give our hero time to grieve—his was a deep and inaudible grief. In the estimation of his countrymen it was unmanly and reprehensible—tears for the loss of a woman they despise and suppress. Zohrab had no disguise in his nature, and he allowed his heart to express its true feelings. At the same time he respected the prejudices of his countrymen, and therefore did not expose himself to their gaze, so long as grief held dominion over him. But when at length he had succeeded in subduing his feelings, a reaction took place, which at once called into life all his latent energies, and restored him to the notice and admiration of his family and friends. He seemed to have shaken off by one great effort all the anxieties which had weighed him down, and he again stood forward the energetic youth, who before his captivity had formed the glory and pride of his country. It seemed as if his nature was renewed—he became the life and soul of the city—he encouraged every one, both by precept and example, to meet with vigour the storm that was about to break over them. He was to be seen in every workshop encouraging the manufacturers of arms in

their labours, and was early among the soldiery, exercising them in the use of those arms. The mortal hatred which he had sworn against the murderer of her, for whom alone he cared to live, impelled every thought and every exertion. He felt that in his own person he could encounter the whole invading force, and avowed himself ready to become a sacrifice to atone for her blood, which, in his conscience, he was convinced had been spilt on account of his negligence.

In providing for the unfortunate Mariam, which he had done by placing her an inmate in his own family, he determined never to see her, and steadily to avoid every thing which might awaken in his mind recollections of the lost Amima. He knew how hopeless as well as how enervating would be any regrets for the past, and, although the wretched Mariam was always making endeavours to throw herself in his way, still he had fortitude sufficient to persevere in his resolution, and found himself all the better for it.

His father, however, who, during his adventurous life had learnt how to take advantage of every circumstance which fortune might throw in his way, as soon as Mariam had reached Asterabad and had made known her story, conceived that through her brother Sadek, some correspondence might be established, which directly or indirectly would throw some light upon the meditated operations of the Shah against the city. But when he consulted his son thereon, he found him so averse to holding communication with one whom he esteemed the executioner of his mistress, that he no longer urged the subject. Besides Zohrab was certain, from the character of the individual, how hopeless any attempt would be to induce him to turn traitor.

He was, however, as anxious as his father to establish some mode of acquiring intelligence; and, from his long acquaintance with men and things about the court, he thought that he could at once name the man best suited to their purpose—the most able, the most avaricious, and the most treacherous—and that man he knew was the humpback.

Zaul Khan willingly agreed to this; the more so, because during his residence at Tehran he had not neglected opportunities of sounding the depth of the barber's honesty, which indeed he had found very shallow. They then unanimously

pitched upon the youth Ali, as the fittest bearer of their proposals, both because they could depend upon his fidelity and intelligence, and because he would be likely to pass free and unsuspected. Zohrab accordingly addressed a letter to the humpback, and in direct terms offered him certain sums of gold, if he would convey back true and certain intelligence of the intended movements of the Shah; of the plan of the projected attack; with as correct a statement as possible of dates, persons and numbers. This done, they called the youth before them, explained the nature of the service required from him, and enjoined the greatest secrecy and precaution. They then gave him the letter, which he was ordered to deliver secretly to the humpback, together with a sealed parcel enclosing a sum of tomauns, which he was also to deliver whenever he had received the answer. The boy lent an ear to his instructions with all the attention of an old spy, and as he well knew every inch of the ground over which he was about to travel, he felt confidence in himself, and having received his master's hearty "God be with you," straightway took his departure.

The father and the son had taken upon themselves the principal responsibility of providing for the defence and security of Asterabad. They had visited and caused to be repaired all the towers, strengthened the gates, cleared out the ditch, and made the approaches to the city as open as the encroaching nature of the dense surrounding vegetation would allow. They had in former times occasionally purchased cannon of various caliber from the Russian vessels which came occasionally to the small harbour some eight miles from Asterabad, and had manufactured a sufficient quantity of gunpowder, an art known very generally in the East. The guns were placed in different positions on the walls, and gave a great feeling of security to the inhabitants, who, in the days we speak of, attributed miraculous powers to such instruments.

One large gun in particular, which had been one of the curiosities of the city ever since the days of Shah Abbas, was mounted immediately over the Theran gate, and commanded the road from which it was most likely the invading army would first appear. A fortunate day and hour was fixed for its installation, a ceremony which was conducted with considerable solemnity; the whole city was collected to see it; the mollahs

were there with their prayers, the women with their shrill cry of encouragement; and the governor, his son, the principal men of Asterabad with the Turcomans, were congregated on the spot to give directions. After considerable labour, it was raised, by means of rude though effective machinery, to the summit of the tower, and then shouts of *mashallah* and *barkallah* rent the air.

During the progress of this operation, an apparently way-worn traveller was seen to enter the gate, mounted upon a sorry broken-down steed, himself meanly dressed, and in no wise worthy of observation, except in being a Persian, a *Sahara nichin*, a liver in the plain. His sheepskin cap was drooping and dusty, his caba of cotton was rent, his red cloth *shalwars* were torn and stained with frequent rains, and his boots had seen their best days. A battered sword hung by his side, a rusty pistol protruded from his girdle, and there seemed no one article about him worth stealing; but with this, there was a certain air, a substratum of gentility, which crept out in various parts of his person, which showed that he was not quite a common man. As he rode slowly on, he looked about him in surprise at what was going forward, when one of the Turcoman chiefs, whose eyes were accustomed to the scrutiny of persons, exclaimed, "By the soul of Zohrab Khan, that is the meh-mander! That is the dog Shir Khan Beg!" The eyes of all present were turned towards the stranger, and at once he was recognised. The recognition was made rather in derision than in hostility, for in the execution of his office during the stay of the deputies at Theran, he had inspired them more with contempt than hatred; but his apparition at this present juncture excited universal astonishment. In Zaul Khan it excited suspicion, and immediately he was armed at all points against a trick. The deplorable looking Beg was forthwith invited to dismount, and mutual favourable signs of recognition having taken place between himself and many of those present, he seemed entirely to have laid by the airs and graces for which he was so well known, and with the humblest mien and language he dismounted and approached them. He appeared to be lame, walked with considerable difficulty, and looked more an object of compassion, than the brilliant and flourishing personage whom their eyes had been accustomed to behold adorned with silks and brocade.

"What has happened, Sir mehmander?" said Zaul Khan.
"You are welcome. But why alone? why so fallen? has fate struck you?"

"May your condescension never diminish!" said Shir Khan, in a very subdued voice. "Ashes are strewn upon my head; I have fallen from above to below; I am come to kiss your feet, and to ask a corner to sit in."

"Tell us your story," said the Blind Lion; "we are your friends; we know no evil of you; why are ye thus fallen?"

"What can I say?" said he; "in consequence of your flight, the Shah seized upon me, and beat me; this is only one among the many miseries which have ensued from that event. I have fled from his hands, and praise be to Allah that I have fallen into yours! You have been the cause of my misfortune, therefore you must protect me. I appeal to you as Mussulmans, let not the destitute apply in vain."

This short appeal softened the hearts of those around, and every one seemed anxious to receive him with kindness. Zaul Khan, alone, did not easily give credence to his narrative, although he did not refuse him a hospitable reception. He inspected him with a most suspicious scrutiny, with eyes that might rival the brilliancy of an eagle's, and as he conceived that he detected an unusual degree of false humility in his looks and general bearing, said, "You must pardon us, Sir Beg, we are rustics, and are plain spoken folks; we call a man a man, and a dog a dog. This is war time; this is a season for open eyes and anxious ears. Whatever you say is right, no doubt; heaven forbid that we should disbelieve you; but you come from a king who is a wonder, a misfortune if ever there was one, who won't let the back of his hand know what is going on in the palm thereof. You too, *mashallah*, praise be to God, are one of those men, who by your own account are not like other men, and are a fit servant of such a king. Not to suspect you of something more than beaten feet, and ragged clothes, and to believe your story at once, would be an insult upon your understanding which your best friends would not put upon you. How much more then does it behove us, who reject the Shah's rule, when they see a personage like you, known to have enjoyed the king's confidence, to have been distinguished by a beating, to receive him with doubt and precaution. Heaven forbid that we should

break through the laws of hospitality ! that we should withhold from you the welcome of peace, that we should not feed and lodge you, or that we should despoil you in any way!—but for our own safety we must ascertain whether, within the recesses of those unworthy garments which clothe your person, are not concealed papers or other things injurious to our safety, or to the welfare of those who look to us for alliance and protection. Allow then that proper search be made, show us that our suspicions are unfounded, and when we are satisfied, we need not say how thankful we shall be to receive one amongst us, who by his valour will add to our strength, and by his wisdom to our councils."

"True you say, O Khan!" exclaimed the humble-spoken Beg ; "if there is wisdom in one man's words above those of another, it is in yours. If *Afatoon* had opened his lips, he could not have spoken better. So much are the men of Tehran astonished at the skill which you have displayed, making play under their beards, and dancing round their fingers, that we no longer say, as learned as Socrat, or as ingenious as Loeman; we now say as cunning as Zaul Khan. The king himself is all astonishment ; from morning to night he sits in a corner with the tip of his finger in his mouth, exclaiming '*Bah, Bah, Bah!*' and saying nothing but 'Wonderful devil,' and 'Marvellous dog's son!' By your soul, by the head of Zohrab Khan, and I can't say more, people talk so much and so continually about you that, as I am a true believer, the prophet and the twelve Imans are now become nothing—nothing more than dirt. I, in truth, I who amongst men am not altogether dust, I have longed to rub my head against your threshold. You see I am come! Whose dog am I, that should not say yes to all you say? *Bismillah!* in the name of Allah! search, look : and first let me remain without a cap." Upon which, taking his cap from his head, he turned it inside out, lowered the lining, in which the only paper that was concealed, was a copy of some lines in which he attempted to describe the beauty of his mistress. He then exhibited his pockets, in which there was nothing save some crumbs and onions ; he showed that in the baggy parts of his *shatwars*, a pair of shoes and a lump of cold rice were secreted ; in his breast he wore his purse, and in his girdle a knife, a pistol, and an iron ramrod.

"Is there any thing more at your service, Sir Khan?" said the accomodating Beg.

"There is no harm done," said Zaul Khan. "Your face is white. Those boots, however old they be, still may contain riches; let us take one survey of them, and all will be well."

Upon this the Beg pulled off his boots, and exhibited his feet, which still bore marks of the punishment they had undergone; and that fact more than any other spoke in his favour, for he seemed to have produced conviction of his honesty in almost every one's mind save Zaul Khan's, and therefore he for the present was subjected to no other scrutiny.

Shir Khan, who had hitherto played his part to admiration, finding himself secure, turned his eyes about, in the hope of discovering the moonshee, Mirza Shireen Aly, to whom his instructions more particularly pointed, as the man upon whose treachery dependence might be placed. He soon discerned him, by the constant discharge of fawning, flattery, and sycophancy, which he did not cease making upon whoever chose to hear him. Compliments upon their refinement and eloquence to the rough Tureoman chiefs—congratulations upon the merits of his son to Zaul Khan—kissing of hands and slavish meanness, interlarded with apt quotations from the loves of Ferhad and Shireen to Zohrab; and indiscriminate offers of service, as well as little acts of attention to every one present. When the Mirza's eyes met the Beg's, he made an inclination of the head, as if to say, "I am your servant," whilst there was evident treason in his look, which the Beg thought he could understand.

The meeting having broken up, Zaul Khan appointed a ferash to wait upon Shir Khan Beg, ordered his horse to be fed, and prepared a room for him in his house. The Beg, however, would in nowise accept of a better place for his lodging than a corner of the stable in which his horse was kept, urging that the beast was one which he prized, and that his care was necessary to restore it to its former vigour. Finding that this would not be permitted, he agreed to take up his quarters where they had been provided, but he insisted upon carrying his saddle with him, saying that he was so accustomed to use it as his pillow that he could not sleep without it. No objection was made to this, and the night passed off without any occur-

rence worth relating; but during the course of it he had managed unobserved to disengage from within the padding of his saddle, a roll of papers, consisting of firman and letters, of which he was ordered to make such use as circumstances might admit; and doing this he said to himself, exulting, "Aye, Zaul Khan, you think yourself a lynx, bat Shir Khan Beg, *mashallah!* is the grandfather of lynxes."

On the morrow, Shir Khan strolled into the bazars, and sought those places where he might expect to meet the traitor he was in search of, and it was not long ere he succeeded. He met him upon entering the shop of a barber, whose good offices he had secured, to trim his head, beard, mustaches, and curls, which had been long neglected. Their recognition was like that of two sharpers, who by certain unequivocal signs, known only to such personages, were at once led to mutual confidence. They very soon understood each other. Shir Khan delivered the letter with which he was charged from the Grand Vizir, to the Mirza, who did not cease to make protestations of his devotion to the Shah's interests, and of his readiness to promote them by every means in his power. He promised when the day of trial came to do wonders, and hinted that with money much might be effected by securing a large party in the city. Zaul Khan was greatly feared, and it was difficult to take a step unknown to him; but the men of the law were generally inimical to him, and that was a difficulty which he could scarcely surmount, for it paralyzed that energy of resistance which he might otherwise inspire in the inhabitants. Shir Khan enjoined the greatest possible secrecy, and said that in proportion to the Mirza's exertions so would be his reward, and those exertions the Shah expected would be made manifest, when his army should approach near enough to form the siege of the city. The scribe promised that he would keep the Vizir constantly informed of every occurrence likely to be useful in placing the city within the Shah's power, and after a hasty conversation they parted.

Zaul Khan rose at an earlier hour than usual, and, having sent for his son, said, "I have had misgivings during the night, that Shir Khan is here for no good purpose. I do not like his conduct since he has been among us. The enquiries he makes have raised my suspicions; and it has struck me, that notwith-

standing his appearance of innocence, he may still have secreted papers in places which we omitted to search. For instance his saddle!—I was told that he would not separate himself from his saddle."

"Let us send for him, in the name of Allah!" said Zohrab.

Just as they had come to this conclusion, old Osman, the *onbashi*, whose delight upon seeing the return of Zohrab has before been recorded, stepped into the room; making a low bow, he stood before them, but with so disastrous a face, that it was evident something had taken place to cause it.

"What has happened?" said Zaul Khan.

"Why stand ye there, Osman?" said Zohrab, in a kind and encouraging tone.

"The king's firman, may it please my masters," said the old soldier.

"What of that," said Zaul—"what firman?"

"The firman which is stuck up against the gate of the mosque," said Osman.

"Firman!" said father and son in surprise.

"Yes," said their informant; "as I am your slave, men are now collected round it, and the mollahs are reading it, and men say that fighting against the Shah is unlawful."

"Did not I say," said Zaul to his son, "that all was not right? I have always believed in forewarnings, and now my mind is confirmed in them. Go, Osman," said he to his faithful attendant; "take two keshekchi with you, and bring hither the Gholam Shah who arrived here two days ago, if he is to be found within the city; and come, Zohrab, let us go see the firman. Our beards have been laughed at, that is plain," added he, shaking his head thoughtfully, accusing himself of negligence in not having exerted his usual watchfulness. When they arrived at the porch of the principal mosque, they there found a large concourse of the inhabitants, who, having heard of the extraordinary circumstance of a royal firman being found posted upon the gate, had come in all directions to see it, and to gain knowledge of its contents. It was addressed to the mollahs, the *Sheik il Islam*, the *peishnamaz*, the *ketkhodas*, and collectively to the *ullemah* and the *rayats* of the city of Asterabad, denouncing Zaul Khan, his son Zohrab, Mustafa Khan, and his whole family, as rebels and outlaws, and calling upon all faithful

subjects, both as men and Mussulmans, in the name of Allah, of Mahomed his holy prophet, of Ali his son-in-law, and of the twelve Imams, to oppose any further resistance to the Shah's government, to seize and deliver to the Shah the said Zaul and his family, and to open the gates of the city to whomsoever the Shah should appoint to govern; and in case of non-compliance, threatening the most summary revenge, by delivering over the city to the horrors of a *Katl-i-aum*, or general massacre, without distinction of age, sex, or situation. To this was appended the *fetvah* of the *Mushtched*, the chief of the law, a man of the greatest celebrity for his piety, making it lawful for any person to take away the life of all or any of the denounced persons.

Zaul Khan, followed by Zohrab, went to where the firman was placed, and with great self-possession having read it through, deliberately pulled it down, tore it into a thousand pieces, and strewed it on the ground. He then addressed those who surrounded him, and particularly a mollak who had been active in reading and explaining the firman to the people. He said, "Tis thus, friends and men of Asterabad! we treat an unlawful command. We do not own the supremacy of the king of Irán, why therefore should we receive his orders? When first he came to the throne, he treated us with justice, and we sought his protection; but elated with prosperity, he would have oppressed us, and we threw off his authority. Be not deceived, my friends, by fair words. The rapacity of the Shah—which knows no bounds, beginning from the palaces of the rich, and descending to the hovels of the poor, searches out and seizes upon that which is not his own—is too well known for me to warn you of. When once you have received either himself or his governors within your walls, you may bid adieu to all security; your houses will be forcibly entered; your harems will no longer be sacred; your labour will be extorted from you, and whatever goods you possess will be taken from you; to resist will be vain, for instant death ensues. If I who am your governor have wronged you, speak; I and my family are ready to go. But if not, and ye be satisfied with my government, then join with me in repelling the oppressor and the tyrant. Our walls and towers are strong; our jungle is impenetrable; we only want unanimity, to be invulnerable."

These words produced a strong sensation over all present. No one opened his lips but to praise, excepting the mollah above-mentioned, and he, evidently in the royal interest, ventured to say, "Whatever you have said, no doubt is true, but in the name of the Prophet what shall we say to the *mashitched's fetvah*? Is the command of a saint of no value?"

"O little man!" said Zaul Khan. "If they have their *mashitched*, we have ours; saint for saint, ours is as good as theirs. By what account do you reckon? If you think I am worthy of death, *bismillah*, come and do your worst! but let our *mashitched* issue his *fetvah*, and say that you, or the Shah, or any of his myrmidons, are equally so, what would you say if I were to take your life? Go, go; don't throw more words into the air!"

This reply to the mollah was so satisfactory to the mob, that all the effect which he thought he had created was at once dispelled, and Zaul and his son returned home more secure in the affections of their countrymen than when they set out, and so far they felt delighted that the Beg's mission should have proved abortive; but still they were anxious to ascertain what had become of him. The old Osman had returned after an unsuccessful search; "And still," said Zaul, "how could he possibly have escaped from the walls unseen and unnoticed?" At length, after much investigation, it was discovered that on the evening before, the Beg, leading his horse by the halter, had asked permission of the officer on guard, a Tureoman, to allow it to feed on a patch of fresh grass without the gate during the night, it being so ill that he was fearful it might die before morning. This had been granted, the horse was tethered, and the Beg returned within the walls. How he got out again no one could say; but true it was that no signs of either cavalier or horse were to be seen; it was plain that he was gone, that he was too well skilled in the arts of deceit to give a pursuer any chance of overtaking him; and thus he was allowed to proceed unheeded and unpursued. Zaul Khan, who judged, and truly so, that he was a match for any one in the tricks and stratagems of war, was at first mortified to have been thus bearded in his own capital; but when he considered how simply the trick had been performed, he could only smile at the result, and owned that he and his colleagues were rightly served for

having thought contemptuously of the silken-vested narrow-waisted Kizzilbash.

"By my beard!" said Zaul, "his ingenuity in making a horse, which it is evident was excellent, pass off for one dying, must be great. Now I think of it, the horse bore the appearance of being in full training, and not of broken condition; he could not else have performed his fatiguing journey."

This incident having placed the governor, his son, and the other chiefs more on their guard than ever, they met to devise the best plan of defence without the walls, and it was determined immediately to man the defiles of the forest with their best musketeers, and keep large bodies of horse on the alert, ready to harass the approaching army in every possible manner.

CHAPTER XXX.

War is fraud, i. e. Stratagem is necessary in war.

PERSIAN DEFINITION.

Ali had toiled with success through the intricate jungles that encumber the territory of Asterabad—had ascended the great Sanduk mountain—and traversed the dreary track which intervenes between the woodlands and the Caspian passes: when, within a few miles of his native village of Firouzkoh, he descried the royal camp spread out before him on its adjacent plain. The royal pavilion, with its crimson *ser-a-perdchs* (walls), arose conspicuous in the midst; the golden balls which crowned it glittering in the sun, whilst the uplifted gaudy silken banners, bearing upon them the royal Persian insignia of a lion and rising sun, were seen floating in the air. Around, extending in various directions, regular in its irregularity, was spread the camp, exhibiting a world of canvass white as snow, diversified by every variety of military ensign. The great officers of state occupied magnificent tents, whilst their dependants were lodged in smaller ones round about them; vying with each other in

the brilliancy of their cortége, the beauty of their horses, and the richness of their trappings. The cavalry occupied the right, the infantry and artillery the left. Before the tents of the cavalry were stuck the spears of the horsemen, giving to each establishment a peculiarly picturesque and Asiatic appearance. Every where horses were standing at their picquets, tethered in long rows, and rending the air with their lively and repeated neighing. On one spot was remarked the dense group of the zambureks or camel artillery, whose high and grotesque saddles, ornamented by pennons of brilliant colouring, added a new picture to military scenery, and surpassed the heavy though more efficient corps of field artillery, by its showy decorations. The surrounding hills were covered with numerous strings of baggage-mules, enlivening the scene by the constant jingle of their bells, and so entirely changed was the whole aspect of his village, from loneliness and melancholy to activity and life, that Ali could scarcely recognize where he was. The pillar of skulls, however, so celebrated in the former part of our story, was still there, serving to remind the poor youth of his earliest misfortune, and a landmark by which he might guide his steps.

The intelligent boy felt that he was now called upon to use every precaution in discovering the tent of the humpback, and in making known to him the object of his mission. He proceeded warily towards the camp, and as he found himself involved in its intricacies, he stopped ever and anon to ascertain the directions of the royal standards, in order that he might thither direct his steps; for in the neighbourhood of the Shah's pavilion he knew that he should find his habitation. When he had approached sufficiently near to begin a closer scrutiny, he discovered a barber's shop, established on the skirt of a row of tents, and of its officiating owner, a brother strap, he enquired the residence of the Shah's operator.

"And what may one like you want of the Goozoo?" said the barber; "he shaves a head like me, 'tis true, but then it is only one, and that one royal and despotic. Other heads he holds cheap as the dust of the field."

"I am a poor boy," said Ali, "and want his assistance."

"Have you money to give him?" said the shaver, "you may then secure his assistance; if not, go not near him, you'll only eat mortification for your pains. However, there is his tent,

pointing to one in the rear of the royal pavilion, and in the name of Allah go, if go you must."

Ali proceeded as directed. The humpback's tent was one of the smaller sort, made of crimson canvas, which denoted that of a royal servant, elegantly made, fitting well to the ground, and mounted on two poles neatly painted. It was lined with a rich chintz. Though small, there was a snugness and a comfort about it, which marked its owner for a man who was not unmindful of his own ease. As is usual in Persia, where every habitation is open to those who choose to enter, Ali, without making further enquiries, lifted up the tent door, and walked in; but in so doing he heard a rustling of silk and huddling on of clothes, as of some one making an escape to the small separate chamber behind. This caused him to pause, but a sharp shrill voice, which he recognized to be the humpback's, crying out, "*Biah, come, come!*" encouraged him to proceed, and he stood before him.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" said the Shah's barber.

"I am your slave," said Ali, "I want you."

"Whence come ye?"

"I come from Asterabad," said the youth, looking around anxious to ascertain that he was not heard; but at these words he heard a rustling of silk, as approaching the separation wall.

"Who are you?" said the humpback.

"Your slave is Ali," answered the youth, "who once waited upon the hostage, Zohrab Khan."

Upon this the rustling increased, and the breathing of some one behind the screen was heard.

"What do you want of me?" said the humpback, roused into attention by this communication.

"I have a letter for you; here it is," said Ali.

Upon this an eye and a small hand were seen through the crevice of the screen, showing anxiety to know what might be the contents of the letter.

The humpback read the letter with the greatest earnestness; but in proportion as he dived into its contents, so did he sidle off from where he sat, to a spot where he could not be overlooked by the eye behind him.

"What have you there?" at length said a female voice, in

the most impatient and authoritative tone : "Who is that letter from?"

"*Cheezinist*; it is nothing," said the humpback, in the coolest manner; and rolling up the note, thrust it carefully into his bosom. Then, in a low tone, and with a very significant cast of his eye, as if he would say, "I cannot speak now," he desired Ali to return in due time for an answer.

When the boy was gone, the back curtain of the tent was violently thrust on one side, and the ardent Zulma, with wild impatience and astonishment in her whole demeanour, darted into the seat on the carpet next to the humpback, and asked what had taken place.

"I heard of Zohrab Khan and Asterabad," said she : "What is it? tell me!"

"Nothing," repeated the self-collected barber ; "it was a youth of no consequence, who brought me a letter from none you know or care for."

"A youth of no consequence, indeed!" said Zulma. "As I sit here, it was Ali, Zohrab's servant, and is he a youth of no consequence? Are you mad, to think Zulma is so easily to be deceived?"

"Ali, or no Ali," said the other, "the contents of the note are of no consequence to you."

"Man," said the maiden, anger starting into her eyes, "can one come from Asterabad, and that one be Zohrab's servant, with a letter to you, and be of no consequence to me? What say you? Am I nothing in your eyes, that you dare say this to me? Or am I become so low a fool, that a still lower fool like you can venture to hold me thus cheap? Show me that letter!"

"By your head, and by the Shah's beard, there is nothing in that letter," said the barber.

"Show it to me," again and again repeated the infuriated Zulma, at each demand the strength of her voice and rage increasing, until at length unable to contain the excess of her passion, she seized upon her companion, and clawed upon his face and beard with the violence of one bereft of reason : "I will, I must have the letter," she roared out.

The barber, who knew full well the vantage ground which he

occupied, forcibly rose from his seat, and abandoned his tent to the sole possession of the violent woman. He left his habitation with all speed, followed by Ali, to whom he beckoned, and when they had reached the skirts of the camp, he seated himself on the grass, and taking out his writing implements, wrote an answer to the letter which he had received.

He then sealed it, and looking into the face of the youthful messenger, said, "You have something more for my hand, have you not?"

"Yes," said Ali, "*bismillah*, in the name of the prophet, here it is;" upon which he drew from his breast the bag of tomauns, which he duly placed in the hands of the traitor.

"It is well," said the humpback, as he looked at the glittering coin with an eye of covetousness and exultation. "Thou art a good servant! There, take this letter; give it to thy master, and when thou comest again be careful how thou approachest my tent. Send for me; I will come to thee; and as thou valuest thy life, never speak to me before a third person."

Upon this the youth took his leave, left the camp, and retraced his steps whence he came, rejoicing.

Not so the humpback: he returned with slow and uncertain gait to his tent, occupied by one whom, though he feared as standing in the way of his avarice, yet he could not help contemning for her indiscretion. She, in the meanwhile, had acquired sufficient command over herself to meet the humpback with calmness, although coldly; but his conduct on this occasion laid the foundation of a determination in her breast to revenge herself upon him upon the first favourable occasion; and as this desire became the constant dream of her thoughts, she did not cease devising every scheme which rancour and malignity could suggest for succeeding in her determination. Foiled in her attempt, as we have already seen, of securing the Shah's permission to follow the camp, she had taken her measures accordingly, and without any assistance but her own exertions, she contrived to reach Firouzkoh before the Shah's arrival, and as soon as her father's tent was pitched she took possession of one corner, bidding defiance to his entreaties to return to Tehran. It may be conceived to what extent her feelings were excited by the scene which we have already described, when we

state that her real motive for the step she had taken was her love for Zohrab, who she fondly expected would no longer reject her, now that her rival was no more, and for whose protection and preservation she hoped her interference, should the moment ever come, might avail. It will soon be seen what a fatal error the humpback committed, in withholding from her the communication he had received.

The Shah, having left his capital with all the parade and ceremony which usually attended him on such occasions, timed by the astrologers, lauded by the mollahs, accompanied by the whole population of the city, arrived in due time at his camp. There he immediately took the command of his army, and although he appeared to make light of the expedition, asserting that ere a week had elapsed he would be master of Asterabad, yet well acquainted as he was with the resources of his opponents, and with the difficult nature of the country about to be invaded, he did not omit any precaution which might ensure his success. Having called his officers together, he ordered a large body of cavalry to push forwards, to ascertain where they might first expect to meet the enemy, to take possession of the defiles, and there to wait until the infantry should come to their support. At the same time he ordered the march of the *Tuffen-chis*, and the advance of the artillery, issuing his commands for a general rising of the peasantry, to make straight the road for the passage of the guns, and, in case of absolute stoppage, to carry them bodily onwards over every impediment.

He was in the midst of these occupations, when the Vizir walked in, and stood before him.

“Has any thing occurred, Mirza?” said the Shah.

“As I am your sacrifice,” answered the Vizir, “your slave Shir Khan Beg is returned, and requests to kiss your feet.”

“Let him come.”

Upon this the Beg, dusted, torn, and wayworn, was seen to walk with difficulty towards the presence, and having made his lowest obeisance, with his hands resting before him, stood before the king.

“Well, so you are returned,” said the Shah; “what say those dogs’ sons at Asterabad? Have they read our firman?”

“Let the royal condescension never be less,” answered the

Beg in the greatest humility ; " owing to the poor exertions of this least of men, they have read it."

" Relate thy story from beginning to end," said the Shah, " and don't lie, or make thyself over officious. First, where did you go ?"

" As I eat the salt of the king of kings—as I am a true believer, and as I hope to live, I will not lie; I will speak the truth; it is this—"

" Speak on," said the Shah.

" Overcoming one hundred thousand difficulties of road, of jungle, of marauders, by dint of keeping his eyes open, your slave reached the walls of Asterabad ; and he entered the gate just as the rebellious dogs (may their souls grill in jehanum!) were mounting a large gun over the protecting tower. By the head of the Shah, it was a gun which since the days of Jemsheed has never yet been seen ! Your slave asked no questions, but entered. He found the whole city assembled ; Zaul Khan, the hostage Zohrab, the Turcomans, all were there. Your slave was immediately recognized and surrounded. One said, ' Seize him ;' another, ' Kill ;' another would have blown him up ; but Zaul stopped all their proceedings, and put questions to your slave. By the salt of the Shah ! your slave gave such answers, that one after the other, all rogues and dogs' sons as they are ! they looked at him with astonishment, and exclaimed, ' Marvellous wise king must that be, who employs such servants !' Your slave made them all less than dust. At length Zaul Khan the cunning said, ' All this is very well ; but we must have proof that all you say be true ; we must search you.' Your slave said ' *Bismillah*, search on !' upon which they turned him inside out. No paper, no firman did they find. Then they remained with their noses in the air, whilst your slave laughed within his beard at them, and said to himself, ' You have got Shir Khan Beg to deal with, and not one of your cows of Turcomans !'"

" Never mind what you said to yourself, ass !" said the Shah. " Speak on."

" Your slave then looked about for the Shirazi, whom he recognized, and soon they understood each other. If your slave has wit ; if he can laugh at men's beards ; if, by the condescen-

sion of the Shah, he can make fools walk round his finger ; he gives all the credit to his saddle ! A *tekelteh*,* by the blessing of the Prophet, is a wonderful thing."

" Wonderful dog's son art thou !" said the Shah, smiling.

" At night your slave took from his *tekelteh* your Majesty's blessed firman, which, if placed on a rock, would melt it into dust, and also his Highness the Vizir's letter to the bankrupt moon-shee. The next day your slave sought the Mirza, spoke to him, secured his obedience to the Shah's commands, and here is his letter in answer. The king of kings may depend upon frequent information from him ; and when the day comes, by the blessing of Allah, he will secure to the Shah's victorious army an easy entrance into the city. On the following morning, long ere the dawn, your slave stuck the auspicious firman upon the gate of the royal mosque, having previously secured the co-operation of one of the most influential mollahs ; and then, with that wit which by the favour of the asylum of the universe he possesses, making his famous horse Ser-mest pass for a sick *Yaboo* at the city gate, and himself for a lame beggar, your slave has returned to claim your majesty's skirt, and to rub his unworthy forehead against the royal threshold.

" *Barikallah*, well done !" said the Shah, amused by the narrative, and pleased with the results ; " you have made your face white ; the Shah is pleased with thee." Upon which the overjoyed Beg knelt down and kissed the ground, whilst the Shah cried out to Sadek, who was in attendance, " Bring hither the *calaat*, the dress of honour ;" and addressing the Vizir, said, " let a firman be made out, in order that it may be known that the Shah knows how to reward a good servant. From this day he becomes a Khan, and commands a thousand men." Upon which a *catebi*, a rich cloak of cloth of gold, trimmed with fine sables, was thrown over his shoulders, until he should be more formally invested with the whole dress ; and then the King, turning to the entranced and overjoyed Beg, said, " Shir Khan *mubarek*, good fortune attend you !"

Should my reader have seized the character which I have endeavoured to draw of the Beg—that of an active, lying, vain, flattering, amusing Irâni—he may perhaps conceive the raptures

* A *tekelteh* is the padding used in a Persian saddle, which is generally detached from the saddle tree.

with which the new-created Khan heard the words which struck his ear, coming not from an ordinary mouth, but from one whence flowed the issues of prosperity or wretchedness, to whom men looked for life, and even for the possession of the air they breathed. He trembled with joy as he poured out the expression of his gratitude, and when dismissed, speedily took his way to his own quarters to await the arrival of the emblems of his future honours. He had not waited long ere he espied Sadek, attended by a ferash, carrying a tray upon his head covered over with a Cashmire shawl napkin, trimmed with gold fringe, and accompanied by one of the mirzas belonging to the Grand Vizir, making their way towards him. His heart leaped with joy at the sight, and as they approached he stepped forward with the utmost obsequiousness to receive them. When they had entered the tent, Sadek took the royal firman into both his hands, and breast high presented it to its owner, saying, “This is the King’s rākm;” upon which the whole party standing up, the mirza read it aloud. It stated the approbation of the Shah of the services rendered by Shir Khan Beg, and what was principally gratifying to his ears, he heard himself styled *Alija*, the high in station, and in conclusion announced that the title of Khan was conferred upon him. Upon which receiving the precious document into his own hands, he carried it with the profoundest veneration to his head, whilst those around him showered down reiterated “*mubareks*” upon him.

He then was invested with the dress; a brocade *caba* or vest was fitted to his person; a Cashmire shawl adorned his waist, whilst a cap with a *goush pish*, or an ear-girding shawl over it, usurped the place of his dusty sheepskin. Then over all was thrown the dignified *catebi*. At length appeared the diamond-hilted dagger, upon the possession of which the deepest longings of his youth had been exhausted. Although the diamonds were little better than bits of discoloured crystal, yet a *kord murasch* bore a reputation that made its owner so superior to the rest of mankind, that he did not cease feasting his eyes upon it as it protruded from his girdle; a sword, with gold enamelled knobs, hung at his side, and completed his adjustment. Then the firman was stuck in a conspicuous manner into the folds of his cap; and thus adorned, complimented right and left, to the fullest gratification of his vanity, he mounted his horse, and

proceeded to make his selam to the Shah. He took the most circuitous road which he could devise through the camp, in order to exhibit himself in all his honours, and never before had he cocked his cap with more satisfaction, or looked with more self-complacency over his person. The reception which he met from the Shah was all he could wish, and for three successive days, arrayed in his calaat, and with the firman in his head, did he enjoy his dignity, and not a little the envy which he created in the breasts of his brother Gholams.

The Shah, in heaping honours upon this vainest of his servants, had marked him as a proper officer to take the lead in the most dangerous part of the expedition, namely, exploring the forests, which in the hands of an expert enemy would require all his skill and prudence. He was thus intended to take possession of the road for the army, clearing the defiles, and threading the paths through the jungle. The country, as far as the commencement of the forest, was open, like the rest of Persia, and of easy access to the troops. There was only one celebrated defile, the *Teng Shemshir Bur* (so called from the tradition which records that Ali, with one blow of his scimitar, had cleaved the rock in twain), which it was necessary to secure in order to obtain a free passage into Mazanderan; and thither the Shah was anxious to despatch in all haste the new-made Khan, with a chosen body of men, in order that the enemy might not be beforehand with him. Accordingly, he received orders to depart, and to keep possession of the pass until the arrival of the main army. The airs of importance which he exhibited upon this occasion, were even new to his own countrymen. He was seen in all parts of the camp, calling up his men, inspecting their horses and arms, and evincing a degree of activity that frequently told upon the shoulders of those who did not sufficiently second his zeal. At length he departed, but he had scarcely passed the defiles of *Serenza*, when he was surprised by the appearance of a small company of horsemen, whose movements were indicative of those of spies; for they kept at a distance on the declivities of the surrounding hills, and carefully avoided approaching him. The cap which they wore, so much larger than the one common to Kizzilbashes, announced them to be Tureomans; besides, their spears were thicker, and they carried them in a different mode to that used in Persia. Shir

Khan made every effort in his power to come up with them, but in vain; they evaded him with so much dexterity, always, however, managing to keep him in sight, that he remained, as the expression goes, "hand broken and head bewildered." He, on his powerful horse, followed by two chosen gholams, darted onward, over rocks, stones, down steeps, up the most difficult acclivities, in the hope of overtaking them, but to no purpose; they seemed to mock his efforts, and as fast as he showed himself on one eminence they rose conspicuous on the one beyond it; until at length, in utter despair, he was obliged to give over the chase and return to his main body. He was dispirited and enraged. It was evident that the enemy had taken the field earlier than the Shah, and had already pushed their parties of observation to the very skirts of the Shah's camp, and must evidently have taken possession of the defiles. With these discouraging prospects, Shir Khan returned to his troops, and calling his officers around him, dismounted, and seating himself upon a patch of grass, addressed them as follows :

"See," said he, "what a thing is *takdeer*, is destiny! I who am Shir Khan, I who have laughed at the beards of the Turcomans, who have made the man whom it is the fashion to call famous, an ass in the face of the world—who have made their great Zohrab less than a dog—here am I seated on the grass, delayed and brainworn. Maledictions upon their beards! maledictions upon their ancestry, if perchance they ever had fathers or mothers! Whenever I get a flea into my shirt, I hunt it—in and out one fold, up and down another, until I catch it—and then kill it; but these vermin, (whose dogs are fleas when compared to them!) they are not to be caught. You men! (addressing the group standing before him) wherefore should I speak on? You know who and what Shir Khan is! He has done things, he has seen countries, he has talked to men, and when the service of the Shah requires it, he treats them like Franks and unbelievers; he has succeeded in every thing; he has carried all before him; but now, *takdeer* has set all crooked, and here he is like a dog looking after his own tail. What shall we do? where go? It is plain these dogs' fathers, the Turcomans and Asterabadis, have already taken possession of the passes! What shall I do? The Shah must know this in-

stantly, whatever may happen. It will excite all his rage, and perhaps he may say Shir Khan has not been active enough. May I desile destiny's grave! for Allah better knows, I may have been made a Khan one day, only to eat the stick on the next!"

Upon this, a rough, weather-beaten Gholam, who had followed the Shah in all his campaigns, said with humility, "Shall your servant go to the camp, O Khan! He will get there by the middle of the night, and be back to-morrow with the Shah's orders?"

"You say well," said Shir Khan, "I would have gone myself, but I can't leave my troops. The army must advance immediately, or the campaign will be fruitless." Upon which he ordered his mirza, for he had lost no time in setting up a scribe, to make a statement of his situation to the Prime Vizir, signifying his determination to push on to the defile, but urging that he ought to be supported by the main army, since it was evident the enemy had already made effectual and alarming advances. Upon this the volunteer was despatched, and the party slowly advanced to take up their quarters at the nearest village on the road for the night.

The Shah was a thorough soldier; all the adventure and circumstances of war were agreeable to him. He then forgot the degraded state of his person, and from the energy of his character he became equal and superior to other men. The more difficulty stood in his way, the more the superiority of his mind was evinced, and that superiority, putting him in good humour with himself, made him forget his other deficiencies, and softened his feelings towards his fellow creatures.

The information transmitted to him by Shir Khan, instead of rousing his wrath, only produced an agreeable excitement. The instant he was informed of the circumstances, he ordered the *jarchi bashi*, or the herald in chief, to appear before him, and commanded him to proceed into the different quarters of the camp, according to established custom, and announce the departure of the army on the following morning towards Toweth, in the direction of the Teng Shemshir Bur. He then ordered all the different officers in command of the troops to assemble in his presence, and issued his commands with an alacrity and even joyousness of manner, which he was known to possess on similar occasions. Very soon afterwards the whole camp was in motion. Different

to the departure of a fleet, the canvass which was now spread, all at once was furled; and the field which but an hour before had been overlaid with tents and pavilions, was at once reduced to its former aridity of aspect. In all directions mules were driving in from the pastures to their appointed burthens; the din of their bells, the shouting of muleteers, the voices of commanding officers, the neighing of horses, and the exciting sounds of the *nokara khaneh*, the Persian military music, joined to the intense activity of every individual, working, as it were, for his life, under the very eye of a king and master who allowed no negligence of duty, all produced a scene wearing a character entirely its own. Not a tent at length was seen, saving a small crimson pavilion of beautiful form and dimensions, which the king himself occupied until the moment of his departure.

There he sat, exulting in a vein of malignant joy, at the surprise and terror which he was about to strike into the hearts of those who had had the temerity to enter with him into a contest, which he was determined to push to the last extremity, and which every one felt must end in their extermination. At the same time, he was too sagacious not to take every measure of precaution in order to ensure his success, as if he were about to attack forces of the first magnitude. What he principally had to guard against was treachery; he felt that a poignard or poison, might be as fatal to him as to the meanest hind, and that in a desultory war such as this was likely to prove, in a closely wooded country, his person could not be as secure as if he were acting upon the bare unsheltered surface of the rugged Irân. He knew how open his countrymen were to bribery, and though he could trust them in war with a foreign enemy, still he did not feel quite so secure in a conflict with his own people.

He had returned Shir Khan's messenger, ordering that officer to advance and clear the Teng Shemashir Bur, were it occupied by the enemy, and at the same time informed him of the immediate advance of the army. His last order upon leaving Firouzkoh was to the Ked Khoda of that place, enjoining him to forward the prince Fatteh Ali with all haste as soon as he should appear returning from Shiraz.

CHAPTER XXXI.

To forbear to pluck your enemy's beard when in your hand, is virtue more than human.

PERSIAN ETHICS.

Ali, after leaving the humpback, returned to his master without impediment, and delivered the letter of which he was the bearer to Zaul Khan. There was so much internal evidence of truth in its contents, that both father and son at once were of opinion to act upon the information it contained. The traitor gave an account of the number of troops to be employed, of the names of their commanders, and of the artillery. He stated when it was likely that the Shah would begin his operations, and showed how easy it would be to advance even to the royal camp without opposition, and take possession of the passes before the royal troops could reach them.

The circumstance which much engaged the attention of Zaul, was the account given of the three pieces of heavy ordnance on their way, for the purpose of battering their walls and gates. With cavalry and infantry he was confident that it would be easy to cope, but guns were monsters which inspired such extreme dread throughout the country, that their reputation alone was tantamount to a defeat. He felt that a royal firman, backed by a *mushitched's fetvah*, and enforced by cannon balls, were engines which his personal influence or ability could never overcome; therefore he determined, and Zohrab agreed with him in opinion, that all their endeavours must be directed to the destruction of the said guns, before they approached the city. Consequently an immediate advance was determined, and Zohrab was entrusted with the command of the vanguard, in conjunction with the old Turcoman chief, the Blind Lion, whose age and experience might be a check upon the impetuosity of the youth, and who was celebrated for his intimate

knowledge of the country. It was settled that Zaul should take the command in the city, and not move further from his post than was necessary for its security, whilst Zohrab was entrusted with the operations without the walls. The determination with which father and son had tacitly inspired each other, of never submitting to the tyrant under any terms short of independence for themselves and their friend, was a feeling which, at the moment of parting, presented many frightful forebodings to their respective imaginations, and which required all the fortitude of the one, and all the self-command of the other, to keep under proper control. Our young hero had equipped himself as if he were about to attend a wedding. A magnificent Turcoman horse, the finest which the pastures of the plains of Kipechak could boast, stood ready caparisoned for him at the gate of the paternal mansion. It was a tall bay steed, with black feet, and hoofs like flint, black mane flowing down its arched neck, with a small head, eyes like an antelope, and pointed ears. It boasted an Arab sire, from the Nejd, and the most celebrated mare of the black tents was its dam. He looked himself like the famous Afrasiab in person. He wore a glittering breastplate of steel inlaid with gold, whilst a helmet, from which floated two small feathers, was fastened to his brow with a crimson shawl, the ends of which fell in folds over his back. A sword of beautiful shape, though of unadorned scabbard, celebrated throughout Khorassan, and an heir-loom in his family, having, it is said, been the favourite weapon of the great Timoor, hung at his side; a pair of pistols in his girdle, and a Turcoman spear in his hand, completed his equipment; and never had so gallant a youth put foot into the stirrup, since those days when Rustum slew his devils, and Afrasiab, to use the language of Ferdusi, covered Persia with the deep shades of night. His immediate attendant was the faithful Ali, who now mounted upon a powerful horse, armed at all points, with the addition of his master's carbine slung at his side, was seen joyfully awaiting the signal to begin this his first campaign.

He had taken a long and affecting farewell of his mother—Mariam had mingled her cries with those of the other servants upon witnessing his departure—and he was now told by the astrologers that the fortunate hour was come—when, turning towards his father, he asked his blessing and forgiveness. Their

hearts beat in unison when mentally they prayed to heaven for each other's security; and as a tear dropped from his father's eye upon his cheek, fearful of betraying weakness before the surrounding spectators, the noble youth with one bound seized his horse's mane, vaulted into the saddle, and with a heart overflowing with love for his parents, with apprehensions for their safety, and with a fixed resolve to die in their behalf, he pushed forward at a rapid pace, followed by the warriors whom he was destined to lead.

Proceeding towards the Shah's position, Zohrab found the information of the humpback true; for he met with no impediment, until he reached the Teng Shemshir Bur. He, with his friend the Blind Lion, carefully examined this defile, and finding that it could be defended by a small body against forces to almost any amount, selected such of his men as were best adapted to the service, stationed them in the most fitting position, and placed them under the orders of one of his steadiest officers. Then he himself, with a chosen few, pushed on to reconnoitre the Shah's camp at Firouzkoh, always keeping in view the one principal object of destroying the three pieces of artillery, and remarking the various spots where, owing to the difficult nature of the country through which they must necessarily pass, an attack upon them might be made with most success.

It was Zohrab in company with the Blind Lion, attended by Ali, who first discovered the advance of Shir Khan, and consequently they thought it prudent to make their retreat to the defile, where, according to every probability, the first essay of their mutual prowess would take place. They had made a sufficiently accurate survey of the approaching force, to be aware that it was intended as a vanguard of the army, and strong enough to endeavour to force the defile, and consequently, that it was necessary to take immediate measures to meet the attack.

A day and night passed away before the parties came within sight of each other. Shir Khan had been apprised that the Teng was already strongly occupied; for his reconnoitring officer had been received by a shot from one of the Asterabadi fusileers, and such an account had he brought of the effective manner in which they had fortified themselves, by making a succession of trenches across the mouth of the defile, that the Khan thought it was necessary to wait for a body of infantry on its way to

join him, ere he ventured on an attack. He had recovered the apprehension of incurring the Shah's displeasure, by the letter from the Vizir, informing him of the advance of the army, and he was once again re-instated in full possession of his vanity and self-approbation.

"See those cows of Turcomans," said he to those around him; "there they sit, so heavy, so stupid, that although they know the Shah with his army is coming against them, they will not stir. That they stir not for Shir Khan, so be it, although he has once made them place the finger of shame in the mouth; yet, perhaps, fools as they are, they may leave it there. The unclean beast, 'tis said, returns to garbage with more relish than to any other food. *Inshallah!* they will know that Shir Khan is not like other men; that when he comes it is not to put the hand of delay upon the rein of astonishment! We will see by what account they reckon."

His impatience to perform somefeat worthy of the Shah's approbation was such, that he determined immediately to attack the entrance of the defile. Zohrab, who from a height saw that there was a stir and a gathering among the enemy, prepared to receive them; and when they came on he placed himself in the trench, and by his presence inspired such confidence in the Tuffenkhis, who unawed by the dense body of invaders remained firm, firing the matchlock guns with so much steadiness, that no horseman was rash enough to advance the lengths to which his commander wished to impel him. And when at length the infantry came to the aid of Shir Khan, nothing was produced save a continued and ineffective discharge of musketry.

At length the near approach of the Shah in person was announced. Troops, cavalry, and infantry, poured in in every direction, and all the pomp and circumstance of war became manifest. Shir Khan lost no time in presenting himself to the monarch, and met him when he was still on the road. He dismounted, and stood by the road side; when the king being near, he approached and kissed his stirrup, whilst in anxiety to learn how matters stood, the impatient Shah curbed his steed and spoke thus—"Has nothing been done; are the dogs' fathers still there?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said Shir Khan, "your slave has attacked them both with cavalry and infantry; and, *mashallah!*

gholams and tuffenkhis have done what lions would not dare to do, your slave heading them; but the destiny which supports the ass supports them. They will not go."

"Increase the troops, and let a general *yurish*, a charge, be made. We will also go, by the grace of Allah! and let us see whose destiny will prevail."

Immediate orders were issued accordingly; and every cavalier present, aided by every tuffenkhi, were called upon to add to the assembled mass.

In the meanwhile, Zohrab had not been inactive, and calling the Blind Lion to him, said, "By the blood of the Guklar, and by the beard of Zaul Khan, let every man who has a heart be in readiness. There is nothing like a first impression. Should we beat off the Shah and his troops, we may hold our heads up for the rest of the campaign; and my father, my home, and my country may be inspired with confidence; let us be firm of heart, and Allah be with us! Upon this they made the best disposal of their forces they were able, stationed small bodies where it was likely the enemy might attempt to take the defile from above, and then threw themselves into the foremost trench to direct and animate the troops in the first onset.

The rush that ensued from the Persians was awful, and in every way calculated to appall a passive enemy. The yells of *ya Allah* and *ya Ali*,* which issued from every mouth as the mass advanced, rang in the air, and resounded in repeated echoes through the close and intricate windings of the defile, which might have made those who were strangers to the place suppose that the enemy were already within its sides. But protected by the mounds of the trench, the usual tenacity of orientals fighting behind fortifications did not desert the Asterabadis and Turcomans on this occasion. They directed their fire with a cool and unerring aim—many Persians fell—others, who had received an impulse too great to be immediately checked, were borne forward with violence to the very foot of the trench, or even carried over it, and taken prisoners; but the result was a total failure; the mass turned about and fled; whilst a brisk fire hastened their steps. No efforts, even those of the Shah, who had thrown himself amongst them, could rally them. His

* It is suggested, whether the word *yell* may not have its origin in the musulman war-cry—*ya Allah*, or *y' Allah*.

quick eye saw that it would be useless to renew the attack with his present force, and that artillery alone could dislodge the enemy. Accordingly, he dispatched a messenger with peremptory orders to the commander of the guns, to advance without loss of time, and, if he found impediments of road, to enforce a *levée en masse* of the peasantry, in order that the guns might be conveyed without intermission of day or night on men's backs.

This was effected, and the three pieces of artillery, to the delight of the army, were shortly after heard rolling over the unpractised roads. The sounds were heard by Zohrab also, whose vigilance was like that of the hawk perched on a rock of observation, and they were sounds which told him that further resistance was vain. He knew the moral effect which even the neighbourhood of such like instruments of war would produce upon his troops; and that they would not oppose for a moment the *Atesh Khané*, the fire-house of the Shah, esteeming it a monster even more destructive than the *Divi Sefid*, the White Devil, that fabulous monster of their woods. Accordingly, he determined to withdraw his troops during the night, being persuaded that the consequences of a retreat in good order were less disastrous than those of a defeat, and its consequent disorder. With every precaution he effected his object in so quiet a manner that no one in the enemy's quarters had the least suspicion of the movement. He moreover lighted fires, and stuck a few caps on such parts of the trench which might meet the eye of the enemy, by which means he lulled every suspicion of his retreat.

The placing of these deceptive caps was a source of great amusement to the old Turcoman chief, the Blind Lion; for he was aware that Shir Khan, his former *mehmander*, commanded the advance, and being accustomed to connect ridicule with his image, so entirely had his effeminate finery and affected manners been despised by himself and his countrymen, that he hoped to see him duped by this trick. And he was not deceived; for still desirous of exhibiting his prowess before the whole army, the arrogant Persian gained permission of the Shah to make one more essay to take the trench by storm, in order that the cannon should not have the sole merit of success.

Daylight had dawned—the sun was preparing to rise—the caps were seen—the whole of the army were made aware of thefeat about to be performed, and the Shah was mounted to encourage the enterprise by his presence. Shir Khan, at the head of five hundred picked Gholams, was early in the field. With his eyes directed towards the deserted trenches, and apostrophizing the unconscious caps, he said, "Now we will see, ye men with burnt fathers! before whom ye stand; Shir Khan, after all, is something in the world." Upon which, sword in hand, he impelled his horse forward, followed by his troops; and hoping, from the early hour of the day, that the enemy was not prepared for their reception, he charged with impetuosity to the very foot of the mound, when meeting with no resistance, he and his men continued their mad career over it, and at that identical moment the sun's first rays glancing upon the spot, to their rage and shame they found themselves opposed to about a dozen of empty caps.

The feelings of the Khan may perhaps be imagined from the character which we have endeavoured to give of him—he could scarcely look up for vexation. Had no vain boasting escaped from his mouth ere he undertook the attack, nothing would have been said; it was boldly intended and boldly performed; but the result was highly relished by those who were envious of the favours conferred upon him by the Shah, and there was no end to the sarcasms and taunts which rang through the army at his expense. "*Mashallah!*!" said one, he performed thatfeat bravely, not like other men!" "*Belli*, yes," said another, "if his head has remained without a cap, he has found plenty to pick and choose from." "After all," said the chief executioner, the most notorious coward in the army, "why does the Shah send such a *foozool*,* such a *chowrowchi*,† on his forlorn hopes, when he has such servants as me in his pay?"

The Shah himself was greatly amused at the result of Shir Khan's act of self-devotion, and could not forbear chuckling and sneering over its result; but at the same time he was delighted at his own sagacity in calling up the artillery, which, merely by the fear they inspired, had cleared all obstacles, and opened the way of the defile to his army. He had too much tact by un-

* An over-officious person.

† A boaster. A talker overmuch.

necessary taunts to damp the ardour of one who was really brave, yet still he could not resist saying, when he came before him to give an account of his morning's operation, “*Ma-shallah, Shir Khan, your face has been made white by a black cap.*”

“Let the king condescend to employ his slave again,” said the Khan, “and, please Allah! he will lay plenty of such caps at the foot of the throne, with this difference, that they will have heads in them!”

“*Inshallah, inshallah!*” exclaimed the Shah, and orders were immediately given him to pursue the enemy with all haste, whilst the whole army made preparations to follow.

Zohrab, in withdrawing his troops from the defence of the defile, had come to the conclusion that it would be impossible to make any stand against the king's army, either in the mountains or on the causeway, if the artillery were again brought forward to clear the way. The next strong hold would be found in passes through certain rocks, of such angular and precipitate forms, looking like trunks and chests, that the name of *Sandük*, or trunk, was given to the whole mountain. There was no other generally known descent on this side, from the table land of Persia to the low countries of Mazanderan and Asterabad and the level of the Caspian, and both the armies, offensive and defensive, were obliged to adopt it, with this difference, that the latter had all the advantage of local knowledge, whilst the former was left entirely at the mercy of guides. The descent of the Sandük was not confined to one pass alone, but to a succession, formed by rocks kept so slippery by the never ceasing fogs and rains of the forests, that it was difficult, even for practised mountaineers, to keep their footing. Their horses and mules, although slipping at every step, from long habit knew how to dispose of their feet in the treacherous rocks; but to strangers it became a service of danger, particularly to the spirited horses of Persia, and therefore the rider in his own defence was obliged to dismount and lead his horse. If such were the difficulties for man and beast, they were almost insuperable for artillery; and it was in the contemplation of those difficulties that Zohrab determined to seize a fitting opportunity, when the guns would be embarrassed in one of the most dangerous passes, to make a desperate effort to effect their destruction. He

therefore proposed a scheme to his companion the Blind Lion, to dispose of their troops in ambush, allow the main body of the Shah's troops to pass, then to await the arrival of the artillery, which generally followed in the rear, and at a concerted signal to rush forth and destroy them. The old Turcoman was delighted at the sagacity of his young commander, and as this sort of hide-and-seek warfare, was the mode of fighting to which he and his men were most accustomed, it met with his fullest approbation. At the same time they determined to leave sufficient men in the defiles by way of blinds, in order to exhibit occasional resistance and retreat. Upon this they took up a position in a secluded dell, where they caused their men to dismount, enjoining a strict silence, which they were in the habit of observing, whilst their steeds, ready saddled, were permitted to graze until the signal was given.

In due time, Shir Khan and his advance appeared and passed on, meeting with such well disguised resistance as to call forth his bravery, and such well conducted retreats as to keep up in freshness and vigour all the luxuriance of his vanity. "Did not I say," he would frequently repeat to his officers in attendance, "that the name of Shir Khan is after all something in Asterabad, and that there is no mother-defiled dog among them who will dare to stop his way? Sandūk, Sandūk! indeed, they talk of their Sandūk mountain as if it were like the Talisman Hill near Kom, which no one can pass with impunity. *Bah, bah,* Shir Khan laughs at the beard of all the fathers of talismans! He goes over mountains, not like other men; he has his own mode of going over mountains!" This was said as his horse and those of his followers were floundering over rocks, whilst occasional shots from the Asterabad fusileers would stop their career, and blanch their cheeks with apprehension. He was delighted to find himself supported by the main body of the army, which followed in one long disjointed file, which Zohrab hoped he might be able effectually to stop, at a still distant pass, even after the destruction of the guns.

With intense anxiety did our hero keep post upon an over-hanging rock where, though unseen himself, he could distinctly see all that passed, his principal attendant being the young and faithful Ali, who followed his steps with all the watchfulness of a spaniel. Every officer, almost every man in the king's army,

were known to them in person, and according to the post which they held in the line, they could form some pretty accurate conclusion how much of the army had actually filed off, and how long an interval might still elapse ere the moment for action would arrive. Their personal feelings were strongly excited, as they saw those appear who awoke in their breasts sentiments either of affection or disapprobation. They had seen the chief executioner go by, and then indeed a thousand recollections arose which gave Zohrab many a bitter pang, and which caused Ali to look up into his master's face and grasp his gun, as if he would say, "Shall I repay him by a shot, for his atrocious conduct to you?" He saw no responsive look, and therefore remained quiet; but shortly after, when the Shah in person appeared, whose quick and suspicious eye peering through every crevice, inspecting every tree, and examining every angle, lest it might conceal a hidden enemy; whose malignant countenance apparently established into inflexibility, preparatory to the vengeance which he was about to take upon the city and people of his abhorrence, the animated youth at this sight could no longer refrain from eagerly exclaiming: "There he is—shall I kill him?" at the same time suiting the action to the word, and levelling his musket at his victim. "Hold," cried Zohrab, equally strongly excited by the temptation, "be quiet, his time is not yet come. Allah forgive him—let us not be murderers—let him pass, Ali—down, down—or he sees us."

The moment of vengeance elapsed, and one of serious meditation succeeded. Zohrab was lost in a thousand reflections upon the sight of the being whose life he had just spared. His own persecutor, the murderer of his Amima, the invader of his country, the announced murderer of himself, his father, mother, and family; the proclaimed shedder of the blood of thousands of innocent people. All this had gone by and he had refrained from taking vengeance into his own hand. The Mussulman youth felt that such destinies were to be wielded by the hand of an all-wise Providence, and not placed at the disposal of a weak and erring mortal such as himself. His thoughts took another direction, when he saw the iniquitous humpback appear, with whom he would willingly have conferred, in furtherance of future plans for the protection of his country; but he was more afraid of his searching and suspicious eye than that of any other

individual in the army, and therefore effectually screened himself and his attendant by the projection of the rock.

The army had now disappeared, and not long after succeeded indications of the approach of the artillery, by the arrival of bodies of peasantry to prepare the road. No labour, however, but that of thousands, and that for a long continuance, could overcome such rocks as those which intersected their paths, and therefore the ponderous instruments could only proceed by the united efforts of the peasants who carried them, and if so, their destruction was certain. At length the moment arrived. Zohrab's heart beat audibly as the sounds of the approaching artillery caught his ear. "Ali," said he, "steal through the grass, seek out the Blind Lion, tell him to prepare his men, let them come on with every possible precaution to yonder thicket, the shouting of the peasantry will drown our noise; and when he hears me fire, let him advance and lay on, in the name of the Prophet!"

This was no sooner said than done. Zohrab had secured a band of fusileers, with their matchlocks in readiness, and these he called to him. When the guns were in sight, and the peasants who bore them were tottering under the burthen, slipping over the wet rocks, and not very well protected by armed men, he ordered a discharge to be fired over their heads. The suddenness of the attack took them so exceedingly by surprise, that unanimously they let their burthens drop, and without once looking behind, they gave way to their fears and fled. Immediately Zohrab and his matchlock men followed up the Blind Lion and his cavalry, fell upon the Persian officers in charge of the artillery, and put them to flight.

They then immediately proceeded to spike the guns, a work of no great difficulty; and kindling a fire, they soon had the satisfaction of seeing the carriages, and the accompanying tumbrils, on fire, whilst tremendous explosions of gunpowder rang through the woods, and announced the catastrophe but too soon and too intelligibly to the ears of the deceived and indignant Shah.

No scheme ever so entirely succeeded. The destruction of those engines, which must inevitably have caused the destruction of his city, and with it of his house and family, infused joy into

the heart of the gallant and sagacious Zohrab, which amply made up for the anxieties he had endured.

There was a descent distinct from the Sandûk pass, but so singularly intricate and difficult, that none of the natives, excepting upon urgent occasions, undertook to go through it. To this, Zohrab directed his troops, determining to hasten onwards, in order to head the Shah's army, and impede its further progress.

When the king heard the explosions of the tumbrils, the truth of what had taken place immediately flashed across his mind. First one explosion was heard, then a second, then a third. The whole army seemed paralysed by the noise, which reverberated through the woods in prolonged echoes, and made the disaster appear doubly terrible. Impressed with the extraordinary powers of Zaul Khan, they conceived that he had set to work some infernal agency, and that the fabulous beings with which vulgar report had peopled the forests, were already beginning the work of destruction. Too soon, however, was the truth confirmed, by a horseman who had escaped from the disaster. The account which he gave of the attack, and the destruction which ensued, made his hearers believe that it was effected by supernatural beings, who of a sudden appeared and in profound silence seemed to be animated with one spirit, knowing what steps to pursue, as if spiking guns, burning gun-carriages, and blowing up tumbrils, were their daily occupation ; and who, after they had completed the mischief, disappeared as if by magic.

The Shah's anger was entirely roused by this blow ; the more so as he felt that he had not taken those precautions for the safety of his artillery, which the knowledge of the country he had to pass through, and of the people he had to contend with, ought to have suggested. He would have wreaked his vengeance upon their commander, but he was reckoned amongst the slain, having fallen bravely in defending his trust. He suspected that so well concerted a plan of surprise could not have been conducted without some treachery among his own officers ; he became distrustful of every one—symptoms of his dangerous and uncontrollable passion were apparent—and those who knew him well, began to fear that the most disastrous and tragic fate awaited Asterabad and its inhabitants.

But far from being dispirited, his determination only rose with the defeat. He immediately despatched orders to Tehran, to forward more guns and a reinforcement of troops—he sent a summons to the city to surrender before his approach, or else the general massacre so often threatened would be enforced.

He succeeded in gaining possession of the mountain passes, to the level of the flat country, by pushing forward a succession of troops; and as there was no defile of sufficient strength to impede the march of the army, the utmost which Zohrab could do was to harass its progress by every means of annoyance in his power. The Shah himself took up a position upon an over-hanging ledge of rock, situated at some distance upon the declivity of the mountain, which commanded a magnificent and extensive view, giving him at one glance the extent of the conquest which it was his object to achieve. The dense forest scenery of the mountain was darkly shaded by a constantly clouded atmosphere; and as heavy outlines of the larger trees receded from him, they gradually subsided into one compact mass of foliage, only broken here and there by the elevation of some giant tree of the forest above the rest. At a great distance, just perceptible, could be traced the cupolas of Asterabad; beyond, in the indentations of the low coast, might be defined its small harbour, whilst the broad sheet of the Caspian sea, bounded by a line of horizon as unvaried as the ocean, presented the same image of sublimity to the eye. Far to the eastward, the immense plains of Kipchak blended their evanescent tints with the sky, and untenanted by cities and fixed habitations, spoke to the imagination of those wandering and pastoral tribes which, like the patriarchs of old, lived upon their flocks and herds, and in whose simple manners might be learnt all that philosophy could teach of the earliest state of man. These were the Turcoman tribes, who were divided and sub-divided into small communities without number, and which extended themselves far to the confines of Tartary.

The contemplation of such scenes would perhaps have softened the heart of any mortal but the Shah; but he could think of nothing save what was suggested to his mind by his own vile passions. Instead of reflecting how greatly he might be the benefactor of his fellow-creatures, he could only devise schemes

for promoting their misery or destruction. Like the sanguinary condor, who, from some rocky eminence, is ever on the watch for prey, glancing his animate and ferocious eye in search of a victim—his powerful talons longing to tear—his beak to destroy: so sat this bloody Shah—thirsting for blood—and only thinking the time too short ere he counted the slain that would be placed before him, as he sat at his sanguinary feast before the devoted Asterabad.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A despot, though he will slay his hundreds unjustly, will sometimes by mistake strike in the right place.

CONVERSATION WITH A TURK.

ZOHRAB's efforts to restrain the king's army from descending into the plain were fruitless; and he now saw that, without having recourse to some new stratagem, it would be in vain to give any check of consequence to their career. There was one spot in the jungle, only known to himself and his Turcoman companions in arms, so intricate in its paths, so surrounded by the thickest and almost impenetrable masses of vegetation, that when once within its mazes, there was great difficulty in leaving it; and he conceived the project of drawing the whole army thither, and then attacking it at all points. To effect this, he determined to have recourse again to the agency of the humpback; he knew the resources of that man's invention, how plausibly he could show why the army should march one way in preference to another, and how easy it might be for him, possessing a constant avenue to the king's ear, to shape his decision to his views, without himself appearing to be their promoter. Accordingly Zohrab lost no time in writing the proper letter, opening to the avaricious mind of the traitor, such views of future wealth, as well as whetting his appetite for it by a present taste, that he hoped some advantage might be reaped, although he did not

allow himself to be too sanguine in his expectations, or his prudence to be set asleep by too eager an anticipation of success. Again he entrusted his mission to the faithful Ali, who accepted it with joy; for his judgment having acquired much solidity during the recent scenes in which he had been engaged, and directed as it had been by the master-mind of his chief, he felt sufficient confidence in himself, that he could perform his task with success. Accordingly, he divested himself of the dress of a soldier, and adopted the simple costume of an Asterabadi woodsman, which consists of little more than a shirt and a pair of drawers and a cap, besides the small hatchet, which is inserted in his girdle. This dress in the warm, close, and sluggish atmosphere of the borders of the Caspian, is enough for the wants of the common people, whose wan and aguish looks speak at once the constant war they have to wage against climate.

He quitted his master, in the full hope of soon returning to him as successfully as he did from his first mission, and having carefully secured the letter within the folds of his cape, he dived into the forest, taking his direction towards the station occupied by the Shah. As he approached it, he heard the hum of his troops among the trees, the neighing of their horses, and the constant wranglings that are inseparable with any congregation of Persians. He approached them with caution; he prowled about, in order to discover how he could most easily approach the immediate resting-place of the Shah, because there he would be certain to find the humpback, and accordingly he determined to ascend higher on the mountain than the royal position, and, having made his survey, to act accordingly. He had acquired all the activity and sure-footedness of a mountain goat, from practice both in his earlier days as a hawkman's son, and recently, as an Asterabadi woodman; therefore it did not require much effort to clamber over the rocky points, and to perch himself on some elevated spot, where he might observe what was going on below. Not far distant from the main position of the Shah, marked by his crimson travelling pavilion, he discovered a small white tent secluded among a thick mass of trees, which he supposed might belong to the humpback, and thither he determined to direct his steps. With all proper caution, he picked his way through the wood, and little by little

had approached sufficiently near to discern who its inhabitants might be. He waited for a considerable time, still no one appeared. There was a *meshek*, or water sack, suspended on its tripod, and some cooking utensils; at a short distance, on a projecting rock, though not much higher than the trees, he discovered, not the humpback, nor a sentinel on guard, but a woman in a dark and un conspicuous veil.

The day was drawing to a close; Ali was perplexed what to do; he felt inclined to address the woman, who would inform him where the humpback was to be found, still he had misgivings that in so doing he might fall into difficulty; for women he knew were creatures of impulse, and a cry of alarm from a female voice, he knew might make itself heard from afar, and he might be seized. However, all things considered, he determined to approach her, whoever she might be, and endeavour to interest her in his behalf. This he did not venture to do at once and by surprise; but when within hearing distance, he began to exercise his axe upon the root of a tree, a habit natural to a Mazanderan peasant, and at the same time sang an air common to the Persians. These sounds attracted the woman's attention, who turning towards him, in a tone of encouragement, asked him who he was, and whence he came?

Ali, pleased with his success, answered, "I am a poor lad, sent by a sick mother to seek a doctor. As ye be a true believer, tell me, where lives a certain *Goozoo*, who is said to perform marvellous cures?"

Zulma, for she it was, having approached the youth, with that quickness of apprehension for which she was famous, at first glance discovered that it was Ali himself, and without betraying the smallest emotion, the true object of his coming at once revealed itself to her mind. She did not allow him to perceive that she disbelieved his story. On the contrary, she encouraged him to think that she espoused his interests, and with dexterity led him on to give her his confidence, enchanting him by the softness of her voice, and the fascination of her manner. His youthful blood was in a ferment at a reception so flattering from one so charming, for although she studiously avoided showing her face, yet she so advantageously put forth all her arts, that she had secured his admiration before he knew whether he stood upon heaven or earth. Gradually she drew him from the rock

towards her tent; he willingly followed, still adhering to his first story of a sick mother. When they had reached it, he found another woman within the tent, a maiden whom Zulma had brought with her as her servant and guide.

"By your soul now," said she to Ali, "describe the ailments of your mother; for we, by the blessing of Allah, are skilled in medicine, and perhaps may stand in lieu of the *Goozoo*."

"As I am your slave," said the youth, "we also have women practitioners in our village, and my mother too knows much of simples, but it is not that we want; it is the skill of man, and of this man, who is said to be equal to *Galenus* himself."

"In truth," said Zulma, "he is all that, and a great deal more. Although his back be crooked, he has the straightest head of any man in Irân, and, as you have probably heard, can tell you what your mother requires, as well from this mountain, as if he were by her bedside; but I am his scholar; he has taught me his art, and when you speak to me, you speak to him. What do you want more?"

"I should want nothing more," said Ali, "if it depended upon your slave, and a talisman written by your hand would not only cure his body, but make his soul touch the skies; but (he speaks with respect) he fears that his mother the woman would not be so satisfied."

Zulma finding him too wary to be driven out of his story, burnt with curiosity to know what could be the object of his errand, certain in her mind that he was despatched by Zohrab. — She determined to ascertain this, even should she be obliged to use force, denounce him to the Shah, and extract from him the object of his visit.

Then turning to Ali, she said, "It will be difficult to find the *Goozoo*, and should you go among the troops you will be seized and ill-treated. Stay here, and I will send for him." Upon which she whispered a few words to her maid, who, wrapping herself up in her veil, left the tent, whilst Zulma continued to throw the net of her fascination over him. She led him on to talk of As-terabad, and he had begun to give some account of their mutual idol Zohrab, when three ferashes, the strongest and most powerful of their kind, rushed in and seized upon the unsuspecting Ali. To throw him down, to tie his hands behind his back, and to secure his person, was but the business of a few seconds; and

when this was done, Zulma said to him, with the same kind manner—" And so, Ali, your mother is sick, and you want a talisman. Boy, you may have deceived us once, but do not hope it a second time. Now tell me, what is your business with the humpback? Speak the truth, and not a hair of your head shall be touched! Delay but for an instant, and you die!"

The perplexed youth was not sufficiently well versed in the arts of deceit to have a story ready prepared for this exigency, and his presence of mind having forsaken him, he became lost in apprehension, and could think of nothing but of the anxieties which his master would feel. This was his first failure, and he felt it like a boy—he gave way to tears and despondency. But notwithstanding this, the delivering up of the letter was the last of his thoughts, and he stoutly denied the possession of any such document. Zulma, however, was neither to be deceived by his words, nor softened by his lamentations. She ordered the ferashes to search their prisoner's person, and sure enough in the folds of his cap (a well-known hiding place in every Persian's person), they found Zohrab's letter. Ali, but for his bonds, would have seized upon and torn it into a thousand pieces, but Zulma's eagerness to gain possession of it, told him how hopeless would be his entreaties that it might be restored to him. She immediately opened and read it. One skilful in physiognomy ought to have been there, to watch the workings of her features as she perused the interesting paper—to have witnessed her abhorrence at the treachery of the humpback—her malignant joy at having him so completely in her power—and her determination to give the reins to her feelings of revenge against him.

"*Mashallah!*" said she, in sarcastic exultation, " a wonderful good servant has the Shah in this imp without a saint. Thanks to him and thy master, young man! the Shah and his empire might be lost through their treachery. Let us go, in the name of Allah! before the Shah let us go—a moment's delay were sin. Bring forward your prisoner," said the energetic maiden to the ferashes, " I myself will go, happen what will. Better that one suffer than thousands should be in jeopardy." Upon this, covering herself with her veil, the importance of her errand surmounting all prejudices, she hastened onward with great resolution of manner and dignity of demeanour, followed by Ali and the ferashes.

The assembled camp were surprised at seeing a woman, considering how strict had been the orders against the appearance of females. Zulma had taken such precautions in the performance of her journey, travelling at night, and hiding herself quite in the skirts of the encampments during the day, that none but her father, the humpback, and a few others knew of her being in the camp. But now the urgency of the case impelled her forward; with her natural impetuosity, and her desire of acting differently from her sex in general, she bade defiance to reproach, and with a determined step made her way good to where the Shah himself was seated in person.

The sun was on the point of setting—the Shah was about to make his evening devotions, and a solemn silence reigned in the neighbourhood of his pavilion, when his ears caught the sounds of conflicting voices; among which, to his surprise, he thought he heard a woman's. He listened again, and still the same sounds struck his ear; but his doubts were soon satisfied, by perceiving a female rush forward, resisting those of the attending officers who wished to stop her, and making straight to the Shah.

"What does this mean?" he roared out with a voice of thunder. "What means this woman?"

"As I am your slave," exclaimed Zulma, excited to the utmost by the step she had just taken, "I have a petition to the king of kings."

The attendants would have dragged her off; but the Shah, struck by her manner and appearance, and altogether by the singularity of the circumstances, ordered them to desist, and said, "Woman, do you know that it is death for you to be found here?"

"As I am your sacrifice, of that your slave is aware," said the undaunted maiden. "Kill me, but first hear. The Shah's life is in danger."

"How?" said the king, in utter surprise.

"Yes, yes," said Zulma: "may Allah destroy me if I lie! Here, here is a letter which will explain all."

The Shah held out his hand to receive it, upon which hastening forward she delivered it, although against every etiquette, and then kissed his knee and the hem of his garment.

These actions were not displeasing to the Shah, for when

she approached him she artfully dropped her veil, and in so doing had exhibited to his view those beaming and animated charms for which she was so celebrated. He was too much interested, however, in the contents of the letter, to think for the moment upon any thing else, and when he had read it, the fire of rage and astonishment broke out upon his expressive features.

"Who and what are you, O woman?" said the king, "that you bring me this letter. Who is it from? Who is it to? Explain—my head goes round with perplexity."

Zulma having had time to collect her thoughts, and from the absence of danger to herself to take courage, thus spoke, "Your humble slave is Zulma, the daughter of Zerb Ali, your Majesty's chief executioner."

"Is it so, indeed?" said the Shah: "you are that Zulma!"

"As I am your sacrifice, your slave is less than the least, and although the royal commands were issued for no women to follow the camp, yet what can your slave say? She is not like other women; she felt that she might be useful in attending the sick, and she came; she felt, if the humpback went, she might—"

"There is no harm done, Zulma," said the Shah, softened; "but what of the letter?"

"Let the Shah give ear to his slave, and he will know all. Whatever she asserts, she will prove; she trusts to her own veracity, and to the justice of the king of kings, and requires nothing more to be believed. She swears neither by the Shah's head, nor by her father's soul, for all she has to say is the truth."

"Speak on," said the king.

"Your slave was at Firouzkoh. Destiny had ordained one day, as she sat in the humpback's tent, that a youth with cautious steps opened the door, whom she recognized to be Ali, a youth, servant to the hostage Zohrab Khan, both of whom your slave had frequently seen in her father's house. Your slave immediately retired, but, surprised at the appearance of this youth, she lent an attentive ear to what passed. He said that he came from Asterabad, and that he had a letter for the humpback; which he delivered and departed. The humpback and your slave are friends, and our thoughts are in common; your

slave requested to know the contents of the letter : he refused. Your slave insisted again and again, and as often did he refuse ; and whatever she might think of his conduct, it remained a complete mystery to her until this very hour. She has now discovered all. The same youth Ali, by the blessing of Allah, has fallen into her hands. He refused to speak his errand, by force she seized the letter from him ; Allah, Allah ! can the king of kings doubt to whom the letter is addressed ! Heaven preserve the Shah ! Thanks to Allah, that your humble slave, who is the least of the less, should have been favoured by *takdeer* (destiny) in discovering this treachery."

Ali, between his two guardians, stood at a small distance, the picture of woe, but still with sufficient self-possession to take a good survey of the scene before him, and to ascertain the chances in favour of his escape. His arms were pinioned behind his back, but his legs were free.

The Shah sat for some time wrapt in thought. At length he exclaimed, "Bring hither the youth, and send for the hump-back!" and looking upward to the summit of an enormous pine tree, which had been struck by lightning, he said, "and bid one of the executioner's gang be in readiness at hand with a rope." An awful fear ran through the bystanders as they heard these words, strongly enhanced by the wildness of the scenery around them. There sat the king, coiled up as it were in the folds of his power, like the dragon of the wilderness spreading terror around ; above him reared the towering stem of the pine, scathed and blackened, overtopping all the trees of the forest, stretching out its burnt and withered branches in stiff and frigid outlines, and presenting no bad emblem of the withered person of the Shah himself.

"And who are you," said the Shah to Ali : "what business have you here?"

"I am the son of the Shah's late chief huntsman," said the youth with confidence.

"*Ahi!*" said the Shah, apparently having heard enough from him, to wish for more information. "Let him stand back," said the king, in slow words, as if he had received an unexpected blow, still looking at the lad with a mixed expression of regret and anger. "And you, Zulma Begum," added he, "stand away

also; we will speak to you afterwards. Where is the humpback?" he roared out with a voice full of dangerous import.

He had not waited long ere the culprit appeared, making prostrations with his wonted ease, but rather perplexed at the suddenness of the call, and much more surprised at seeing the number of people collected at so unusual an hour.

"Stand forth!" said the Shah.

These words, uttered with a solemn voice, made the traitor's heart sink within him: and as he stood alone, and disengaged from the rest of the crowd, he made his lowest inclination.

"Hear the words of the king: listen to his question, and answer as you hope for salvation. There was once a dog; a dog, mangy, ill-savour'd, and of broken fortunes; the refuse of its species; despised by men, avoided by other beasts; one man only in the world felt compassion for its sufferings; he took it in, fed it, cherished it, placed every confidence in it; made it the guardian of his house, and the companion of his hours. Long did this go on, disinterested kindness on the one hand, apparent undeviating fidelity on the other; when one day, for a piece of dainty meat, not a bit more dainty than what it got at home, did the ungrateful beast betray his benefactor's trust. What ought to be done to such a beast? speak, O man! speak."

The humpback's fears were excited to such a degree that he could scarcely utter; he looked with a suppliant face around, to see if he could discover a friendly countenance—the whole scene was that of ominous despair.

"Speak!" said the Shah in a voice of thunder.

"As I am your sacrifice," said the wretched man, "your slave knows nothing. He has fallen from the clouds. Whatever the Shah ordains is right."

"Art thou that dog?" said the Shah: "speak, yes or no."

"What does your slave know? He is less than a dog, or even the meanest reptile that crawls, before the face of the asylum of the universe; but, as Allah is in Heaven, as Mohamed the blessed is his prophet, and as Mohamed Shah is the shadow of God upon earth, your slave has done nought, save to pray daily for the happiness and prosperity of the sovereign of Irân."

"So is it?" said the Shah, with a most incredulous face.

"As I am less than the least, it is," answered the humpback,

stroking his beard and face down into as open an expression as possible.

"What does this mean?" said the Shah, holding the letter out to him.

The humpback looked at it with astonishment, and having read it, delivered it back to the Shah, saying, "As I am your slave, its contents are totally unknown to me."

"But," said the Shah, "it begins by allusions to the affair of the guns—knowest thou aught of that? There is treachery in that."

"What guns? what treachery?" exclaimed the humpback, with the greatest affectation of innocence. "Your slave knows nothing—kill him, take off his head; but he is as ignorant of this matter as the child unborn."

Just at this moment Zulma, who had been intensely attentive to the whole scene, no longer able to restrain her impatience, broke through all propriety, and pushing through the crowd, stood before the king, exclaiming to the culprit! "Thou knowest nothing, sayest thou, liar! Who saw thee receive a letter at Firouzkoh through the hands of Ali? Was it not I? And is it not Ali who has also brought this?"

Upon this the Shah ordered the youth to be brought forward, and to the barber's dismay, there he stood indeed an unwilling spectator of this strange scene.

Still the humpback, who by this time had recovered the use of his senses, seeing no positive proof alleged against him, again stoutly denied being in any manner a party concerned in the letter. During this examination he appeared uneasy in his person; and against all etiquette, which enjoins a respectful position and a steady attitude, his hands were continually wandering towards that part of his dress where a small pocket is placed, and where secret papers are usually carried. This uneasiness became more conspicuous at seeing Ali, when the Shah, whose suspicions were easily roused, said to the ferashes, "Search him! whatever is found in his pockets bring to our presence."

Upon hearing this, the poor wretch broke out into a cold sweat, his knees knocked under him, and he could say nothing, but "*Cheeki nist*, there is nothing." However, in the very pocket, where he had first deposited it, there was found, among

other papers, the original note which he had received from Zohrab.

No sooner had the Shah read it, than without saying another word, and with an ominous fierceness of manner, he pointed upwards to the withered pine-tree, and straightway an executioner's officer was seen ascending with a rope to throw over its highest branch, whilst others seized with ruthless hand upon the condemned traitor.

One must have heard them to conceive the piercing cries that issued from that small body. As soon as he perceived the fate that awaited him, he gave utterance to the most heart-rending lamentations. He threw himself upon the ground before the Shah, in attitudes the most abject; he begged for life, as if it were sweeter to him than to any one else; he entreated Zulma, the ferashes, Ali, any one and every one around, to intercede for him; in short, so miserable a spectacle of human woe and human weakness was scarcely ever seen. But all would not do. When every thing was ready, and the rope about his neck, at a signal from the king, the ill-fated man was drawn up with the rapidity of lightning to the highest branch, and there he swung to and fro, a future feast to the vultures, and an intended beacon to the enemy, warning him not to trust for the future to a traitor's interference.

The whole scene was full of awe, and as the blast swept through the forest glades, and agitated the tops of the highest trees, the withered branches of the pine-tree creaked, and as it were moaned over the forsaken corpse which they bore. The uplifted faces of the assembled crowd, looking their last at the well-known form of the creature who not an hour before had been their dread; the stern figure of the king, and the silence which reigned, altogether produced a solemn and impressive effect.

The Shah then said, "Where is the youth Ali?" A feeling of commiseration arose in the breasts of the king's servants, at the fate which was likely to await him, for he was known to them, and an universal favourite; but, to the astonishment and dismay of the two ferashes into whose charge he had been placed, on looking round, instead of a human creature as they expected, they only found a shirt. It seems that the intelligent

youth had not for a moment forgotten his own situation during the interest produced by the execution of the humpback, and taking advantage of the fixed attention of his guardians, with great dexterity he unloosed the bandage which confined his wrists, slipped out of his shirt, and standing as they did on the brink of a precipice, he stole down it with the greatest caution, and plunging at once into the thick wood which surrounded them, he escaped, and at the moment unnoticed.

The Shah overlooked the negligence of the ferashes, for it had not been his intention to put the boy to death ; but they escaped miraculously, and therefore received the congratulations of their friends. On any other occasion death must have been their fate; but in the centre of the woods, suspicious of all, and fearful of too much raising a feeling of disgust in his attendants against himself, he for the present smothered his anger, and dismissed those who had assembled. But Zulma still stood before him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Then all was well until a traitor came, when all went ill.

PERSIAN HISTORY, *passim.*

THE Shah, as we have before observed, was struck with the beauty of Zulma. Instead of taking offence at her disobedience of his commands, that circumstance alone, accompanied by the boldness and decision of conduct which she had just exhibited, placed a character before him which in his mind's eye he conceived never could exist amongst Persian women, and elevated her in his estimation. This probably would never have been the case, had he not ascertained that she was possessed of great beauty, that passport to the heart, and which even in his breast engendered a kindly feeling towards her. Although he scarcely was ever known to change a determination once made, yet he liked to be governed in small things, and was pleased to have some one about him, with whom he might relax his mind by

light conversation. Amima had been to him a friend of so superior a character, that he vainly hoped again to possess one like her. Her image occasionally haunted him, and then pangs of remorse and horror would dart through his heart, which made him a wretch indeed. Having lost her, he had thrown himself more than commonly into the hands of the humpback, who was gradually acquiring a great influence over him, until the catastrophe which we have just related took place; and now in the energetic and apparently open character of Zulma, he hoped to have discovered one who might fill the place of both. Therefore, after the dismissal of his attendants, he called her to him, and spoke thus: "Zulma!" he said, "the Shah is eminently pleased with your conduct this day. You have probably prevented the destruction of his army, and eventually saved his life. He is thankful to you. Ask something of him, and he will grant it—by the head of the king, he will grant it!"

Zulma was overjoyed to hear these words, for they were the forerunners of that eminence among women which in her scheme of ambition she had promised herself to attain. Accordingly she knelt down, and kissing the ground, whilst she again exposed her face to the king's gaze, she said, "Your slave is as the dust of the earth before the king of kings. What can she desire when she stands in his presence? What more can she desire than to be allowed to stand before him, and enjoy the protection of his shadow?"

"So be it," said the Shah, "let Zulma for the future walk with her head erect; let her sit on the musnud of honour; let her wear the jika and the kalaat of the king's approbation;" upon which, having dismissed her, he sent for her father, to whom he communicated his wishes, and ordered him to provide her such tents, servants, and equipages as were worthy of a royal banou.

Nothing could exceed the exultation of both father and daughter at the extraordinary turn which had thus suddenly taken place in their fortunes, and it will be understood how rapidly the influence of the ardent and designing Zulma spread itself over the minds and actions of the Shah, by the quick operation of its first efforts. The dastardly executioner was too happy, as it may be imagined, to seize the opportunity of remaining behind in the rapid military operations about to take

place, in order to superintend the formation of his daughter's establishment.

On the very next morning the army proceeded on its descent into the plain; for the Shah had received the welcome intelligence from the active Shir Khan, that he had secured every defile, and obtained full possession of the country to the commencement of the great causeway, which opened an easy avenue to the very gates of Asterabad. Accordingly, large bodies both of infantry and cavalry were seen making their way after the irregular manner of Asiatics, awakening the solitude of the woods by their shouts, and full of renewed spirits at the hope of soon seeing an end of their fatigue by the possession of the city. In such immense tracts of woodland any deviation from the main body of the army was dangerous, inasmuch as Zohrab's troops infested its flank, and with persevering activity and boldness did not lose an opportunity of seizing stragglers and making prisoners. Consequently, the line of march was as well kept as if the steadiest discipline marshalled their ranks.

The Shah having reached the causeway, took up his station on an open spot in the forest, and called a meeting of his officers, in order to deliberate upon the most effectual mode of attacking the city. It was a question of considerable difficulty, considering its position. The jungle nearly enclosed it on every side, therefore, although troops might approach the walls almost unperceived, yet, unless assisted by guns, such help could be of little avail; for to attempt to scale the walls without a breach, was a feat to which no Persian troops could be brought, and to make a breach was itself unknown in the tactics of Persia. The gates were the principal objects of attack, and that of Tehran being the most easy of access on the causeway, it was upon that point the Shah and his captains agreed to commence operations.

Shir Khan had returned from the advanced posts to wait upon the Shah, and he attended the council in addition to the general of the cavalry, to the commander of the *tuffenkchis* and guards, and the chief of the camel artillery. The Vizir was also present, as well as the chief executioner.

" You, who are acquainted with the fortifications of the Tehran gate," said the Shah to Shir Khan, " speak. Which will be the best mode of attacking it ? "

"As I am your sacrifice," answered the Khan, "the dogs' fathers have mounted a gun upon it: of that the king of kings must not lose sight, because, whatever such a man as I might do, with that gun staring me in the face of what use would my sword be?"

"The grave of the gun's father be defiled," said the king. "It fires once, and then the kizzilbash laughs at it. The gun is nothing. The hand to the sword, and then forward. When once we get to the first gate, our numbers will force it down."

"By the head of the Shah," said Ismael Khan, "give your slave order to attack it forthwith with the Gholams, and my soul is your sacrifice if we don't get into the town at the first onset."

"What is cavalry compared to my *tuffenkhis*," said the commander of infantry; "first we clear the walls with our matchlocks and then we make a *yurish*; and having destroyed the gates, we enter. Then in the name of Allah, we will slay on, till the Shah cries stop."

"*Mashallah!*" said the old Zamburekchi Bashi, "as I am an old servant and your sacrifice, are my *zambureks* nothing, that I am to be left with a finger in my mouth? The enemy have got one gun—*mashallah!* we have got a hundred! My camels make our castle, and our guns fire as true as, praise be to God! the eye of the king of kings."

"After all," said the Vizir with solemn deliberation, having waited till all had spoken, "as I am your slave, every man's way may be good, but by the salt of the king let us see whether mine be not the best. The centre of the universe will see that his *takdeer*, destiny, will have the upper hand, and that without sword, without artillery, a certain Shirazi will come and invite him to walk into the city, in spite of every effort and every resistance which the rebels may make."

"*Inshallah, inshallah!*" was exclaimed by the Shah, and repeated by every one present, when the Vizir said, "The king knows best what is to be done, but let your slave suggest the necessity of first sending a summons to the rebels to surrender; perhaps, by the blessing of the prophet, wisdom may have entered their souls, and they may be crying *Aman, Aman*, longing to rub their foreheads in the dust, and to seize the king's skirt."

"Well spoken, by the king's head," exclaimed the Shah; "quickly let a summons be made. Let the *jarchi baski*, the

herald in chief, proceed to the city, and in the name of the king order it to surrender, or to stand the consequences. Shir Khan," addressing himself to that officer, "go you also—they know you—and make our resolves fully and clearly known to the rebels. Pardon, if they surrender; a general massacre if they resist."

"By my eyes," said Shir Khan, "by the condescension of the king of kings, they will at length know Shir Khan better than they do our Holy Prophet."

Upon this he departed, taking with him the herald accompanied by the brilliant cortege which attends that officer, and very soon after they were on their road to the Tehran gate of Asterabad. Leaving him for the present, we return for a while to Zohrab.

Ali having made a successful escape from his guardians, crawled with difficulty through almost impenetrable masses of wood and thicket to escape the king's troops, and at length succeeded in rejoining his master, who on the other hand had been waiting for him with the greatest anxiety.

The plight in which he appeared spoke his ill success, and Zohrab at once saw that there was nothing left for him, but to make such a disposition of his troops as might best annoy the invading army, and then rejoin his father in the city. Having given proper directions to the Blind Lion, he speedily returned to Asterabad, accompanied by Ali. The meeting of the father and son bore the same character as their leave-taking; their energies were the same, their determination of resistance unchanged, and although they had not succeeded in impeding the advance of the Shah, still as he came unattended by artillery, their hopes of ultimate success were great.

Aware how near the invading army had approached, they were prepared at any moment for an attack. Zaul and his son had taken up their head-quarters at the Tehran gate of the city, and had loaded the great gun to its very muzzle, with a determination to discharge its contents into the centre of the first body of troops which appeared. They were about so to do, as soon as they perceived Shir Khan and the heralds approaching; but when it was ascertained that they were not a hostile body, they waited for their arrival. When Zaul once again saw Shir Khan, he could scarcely refrain from making merry at his

expense, considering the different manners and the various characters in which he made his appearance at that very gate.

"*Mashallah!*" he exclaimed upon seeing him, "your place has long been empty. My eyes are enlightened at the sight of you. Old friends ought not to meet in this manner; but for this once Zaul Khan must shut the gates of hospitality, and refuse the hand of welcome."

Shir Khan, who in truth entertained some latent hope that he might be the means of averting the certain destruction which awaited Zaul, his family and city, called upon him in the most serious manner to reflect upon what he was about to decide. He said, "I am your friend—*wallah billah*—this is no jest. You do not know what the Shah is; he is the father of all misfortune. Let me adjure you, by the soul of Zohrab Khan, to surrender yourself to the Shah's mercy; except in that, you have no hope. After all, is he not king of Persia?"

Zaul would not allow himself to be influenced by Shir Khan's words, notwithstanding he was certain that there was truth in his professions of friendship, and that being in the main a man of good heart, and in this instance of fair intentions, he really wished him well. He reposed such confidence in the excellency of his cause, in the staunch support which he would receive from his friends and troops, and in the precautions which he had taken for the defence of his city, that to surrender was the last of his thoughts; and this determination he freely announced to the heralds. "Go," said he, "say we are ready to open our gates, provided we be secure of our independence; but short of that, we will resist until we have no strength left to wield a sword."

Shir Khan continued to exert himself for a long time in his endeavours to persuade Zaul Khan and his son from their purpose, but unsuccessfully; when losing all patience, he said to them, "God take you into his holy keeping! If blood there must be, let it be upon your heads. I wash my hands of it. All I could do, I have done." Upon that he and his party turned their horses' heads in the direction of the king's camp, feeling that the next communication which took place between them would be through the medium of the destructive engines of war.

As soon as they had delivered their message to the Shah, he

ordered that the first attack should be made on the Tehran gate, so early in the morning that it would be difficult for the enemy to make any certain use of their piece of artillery. It was intended to be a simultaneous attack, of horse and foot; a party of men with axes were to cross the ditch, and attempt to batter down the gate, whilst infantry in small bodies disposed here and there, as the ground and wood might protect them, were ordered to keep the walls clear by an incessant discharge of musketry. At the very moment that this decision had been made, a general alarm of an attack was heard in every part of the royal camp—the day was closing, and the noise and confusion which ensued exceeded all description. The indefatigable Zohrab had determined to make one desperate effort without the walls, ere he allowed himself to be enclosed within them, and having collected all the cavalry and infantry which he could muster, he threw himself unawares upon the enemy, with the intention of making his way good to the Shah's tent, and seizing his person. Nothing was better planned and more gallantly executed; but with that precaution against surprise which always marked the Shah's generalship, he was on horseback upon the very first alarm, and heading his gholams met the invaders with so determined a resistance, that with every effort of Zohrab's bravery and skill he was obliged to cede to numbers, and return whence he came.

The military operations of Asiatics must not be judged by the standard of Europeans: their attacks are desultory and furious upon the first onset, whilst their retreats are as rapid as the advance has been impetuous. The troops being without discipline, consequently no place is fixed for each individual; the soldier, unsupported by his neighbour, feels that he in his own person is, as it were, opposed to the whole body of the enemy, and that he must depend upon his own personal prowess for any result that may be produced. Consequently, it is frequently seen that most heroic feats of individual bravery are performed, whilst the army in the mass has behaved in every way disgracefully.

Zohrab retreated to the city, fully expecting the morning attack, and he was not mistaken. He and his father remained in a state of watchfulness upon the towers of the Tehran gate during the whole night, taking rest by turns, determined

upon the first approach of the enemy to put the whole city upon the defensive. An hour before the dawn, Zohrab's ear was struck by sounds unusual to the silence of the woods ; they consisted of an undefined rustling, like the first approaches of wind, and gradually as they became more distinct it was plain that the expected attack was at hand. Instantly every one was at his post, and ready to act upon the first signal. The moon had just set, and there was no appearance of the dawn, consequently darkness obscured the face of nature.

The advance of the Shah's army was now distinctly heard, though not seen ; the awful and mingled sounds of men in array against their fellow-creatures produced that uncertainty as to the results of the contest which called forth every energy. Zaul Khan and his son, Mustafa, and the other chiefs, were collected in a body, Zaul himself holding the match of his trusty piece of artillery, ready to discharge it at the most fitting opportunity. At length part of the advance was seen, and by degrees a denser mass, accompanied by the clang of arms, and the shouts of chieftains, showed how powerful was the body of assailants. Judging by the conformation of the road they could not be far distant. The first streaks of morn began to illumine the east, and lightly gleamed over the body, bristling with spears and streaming pennons.

At that moment Zaul stood forward, pointed the gun, and then invoking Allah and his prophet, with a steady hand and eye he advanced the match, and an explosion took place such as had not been heard in Asterabad by its oldest inhabitant. Its effects were instantaneous. Before the smoke had cleared away, the invading mass had almost entirely vanished, whilst the varied sounds which struck the ear might be assimilated to those which take place at the sinking of some great ship in the deep. Shouts of alarm, cries of pain, lamentations, all were mixed up with the reverberating echoes of the explosion in the woods, and produced as great feelings of joy in Asterabad as they did of dismay in the royal army. At this moment Zohrab, mounted on his powerful steed, was seen in the greatest activity collecting a chosen body of horsemen around him, himself conspicuous in the crowd. Beaming with animation, he ordered the gates to be thrown open, and placing himself at their head, he darted off at full speed in pursuit of the retreating army. The vigour of

their pursuit greatly increased the rapidity of the Shah's flight, and for a moment it was thought that the defeat was conclusive, and had emancipated Asterabad of its enemy; but those who judged thus, little knew the man they had to deal with. The Shah had not, 'tis true, anticipated such a reverse—but he was not unprepared, and not at all disheartened. Having retreated to a sufficient distance to rally his troops, he came to a halt, in order to devise some more effectual measure for a future attack. A few days passed over ere his army had recovered their defeat, whilst hope and confidence animated the city. However, a circumstance took place which soon altered the face of things.

It was in the dead of night, when the Shah, whose slumbers were usually disturbed, thought he heard men's voices close to his tent speaking in suppressed whispers. He immediately exclaimed, "Who is there? As you would live, speak!" A voice which he recognised to be the Vizir's, said, "As I am your sacrifice, it is your slave Hajji Ibrahim; let the Shah be tranquil, for his good fortune is at work in his service."

"What has happened?" said the Shah in a low voice, for he soon discovered how urgent secrecy was.

By the glimmer of a small lantern, whose dim flame scarcely threw light upon the objects around, appeared the Vizir, and with him a man dressed as a Mazanderan peasant, all torn and disfigured, indicating that he had forced his way through brake and bramble. His appearance bespoke the most abject of mortals, whilst in his features there was a smile of self-confidence, which said that he felt secure of meeting with a good reception.

"Who is this?" said the Shah, his gaunt figure rising from under his Cashmire quilt, the dim light so indistinctly revealing the form of his figure, that he might, both in voice and aspect, have been taken for some corpse rising from the tomb.

"It is he of Shiraz," said the Vizir, "of whom your slave has already spoken. He brings us intelligence from the city, and offers to lead the Shah's troops to certain possession of it."

"How!" said the king, much delighted, whilst a flash of suspicion crossed his mind. "But is this a trick of that dog's son, Zaul, or are we to put trust in our good destiny?"

Upon this, Mirza Shireen Ali, for it was he, threw himself upon his knees before the king, and began to take a series of

oaths, usual upon similar occasions, of his truth, his devotedness, and made liberal proffers of his head and life, in case he were found deceitful. "But," said he, "not a moment is to be lost. Order a strong detachment of your best troops to follow me, and I will lay down my life, if, ere to-morrow's dawn, they are not in full possession of the Resht gate of the city." He then stated how he had succeeded, through the co-operation of certain of the priesthood, to insure a strong party for the Shah within the city, and that, at an appointed signal from without, the said gate would be opened, and a free entrance given to himself and followers.

Upon this the Shah immediately sent for his faithful Shir Khan, and confided to him the care of this expedition. In giving him his final orders, in a low tone of voice, he said, "I have one thing more to say; place that Shirazi with a burnt father between two decided fellows, and give them orders to cut him down, should you perceive the least sign of treachery; and now Allah be with you!"

The time was calculated when this detachment ought to reach its destination, and it was determined that a renewed attack should be made on the Tehran gate, in order to create a diversion. Zaul and Zohrab, from excess of fatigue, had relaxed from their watchfulness, and, during the ensuing night, had retired to rest, fully convinced that, owing to the recent defeat, it would be impossible for the Shah to get his troops sufficiently into order to renew his attack, at least for several days. They looked upon the Tehran gate so entirely as the point upon which the succeeding attacks would be directed, that although they had stationed a sufficient force at the other gates of the city, still they had not paid that attention to their security which they afterwards found they ought to have done.

The day had not yet dawned: stillness reigned throughout the city, and the slumbers of the commanders had not been yet disturbed, when one in the greatest haste was seen rushing towards the governor's head-quarters, and pushing his way through every impediment, made his way good to where Zaul Khan was asleep. It was the old Osman, who has come to the reader's notice on several former occasions, and who now in the greatest fright awoke his chief with these words: "Oh, my Aga, my master, arise, arise! There is a movement at the

Resht gate which your servant does not like. There are troops coming from without, and there has been a struggle within. In the name of Allah! come quickly." Zaul was instantly on the alert. Zohrab was there too. Both were immediately on their road to the prescribed spot, followed by as many men as they could collect on the urgency of the moment; but ere they had proceeded one hundred yards through the city, they were met by soldiers running away in dismay, who asserted that the gate had been treacherously opened, and that the enemy were entering in full force. At that moment a cry was heard from the sentinels on the towers of the Tehran gate, that the enemy was approaching, and soon after, the report of the great gun was heard, a sound which spread terror and dismay through every breast. Zaul and his son were perplexed what course to pursue. In hasty consultation they agreed thus: "Be our rallying point the gate of the Ark or Citadel. I," said Zaul, "will return to the Tehran gate; you, Zohrab, try to resist the enemy, should they really have made their entrance good; but if you fail, retreat into the Ark."

Zaul found that the officer on the Tehran gate having, in the greatest alarm, without skill or coolness, fired the gun, its contents had been thrown away, without producing the least effect, and consequently the enemy had advanced to the very brink of the ditch, had crossed it, and were in the very act of battering down the gate. The brave chieftain at once found himself totally abandoned by his troops and officers, who by general consent were making the best of their way to the citadel. Thither the baffled Zaul also bent his way, despair in his breast, but resolute of purpose; and he had scarcely reached its entrance, ere he saw his son effecting a retreat before a mob of assailants, who appeared to have been joined by a great concourse of the townspeople. They met at the gate of their last strong hold, and their feelings in so doing were indeed of a nature which would have depressed bolder hearts than theirs,

"Zohrab, my child! my friend!" said the broken man, as he dashed a tear from his eye, "thy father survives not this day."

"Oh my father!" said the afflicted youth, "thy son will die with thee; but what becomes of my mother?"

"Go, Zohrab," said Zaul, with resolution in his accent, "ge-

into the harem, prepare her for the worst, and take every precaution for securing her retreat through the wicket gate into the Turooman country. Having done that, return unto me. Thy father will never see his house more ; he dies here."

"Perhaps we may still receive succour from without," said Zohrab doubtingly ; "the distant tribes of Turcomans are marching to our succour."

"Vain hope," said Zaul ; "who will come to our help, when they know our castles are gone? No, Zohrab, we fight to-day, and to-day only! But this I command you, as your father, and listen to his last words—Throw not your life away; be ye your mother's protector; live for her. Swear this upon this sword, and upon the holy Koran which binds my arm."

"I swear, if I live," said Zohrab, "never to abandon her; but I will never abandon thee, O my father!"

The struggle that took place between these two noble-hearted men was worthy of the finest age of heroism. Already had shouts from the multitude attested the entrance of the Shah's troops, and the first sounds of the enemy's attack upon the gate of the Ark were beginning to be heard, when Zohrab hastened to put his father's orders into effect, and to prepare his mother for the miseries which were about to overwhelm them. He traversed the well-known courts of his father's palace with an aching heart, and, as he met some of the old domestics on his way, it almost burst with anguish at the fate which was awaiting them. He entered the harem with a look which was indeed portentous of the ill-fated message he was about to communicate. The horrid and tumultuous sounds which struck their ears, had warned its inmates that all was not right, and the moment they saw Zohrab, their fears increased to a certainty. Without waiting for explanations, they raised loud cries and lamentations, whilst Zohrab's mother, rushing into his arms, read in his woe-stricken countenance all he would disclose.

"Where is your father?" said she ! "my son, tell me. Am I a widow ? Oh Zohrab, tell me, tell me!"

"Heaven forbid, my mother!" said he, "he lives and is well; but our affairs have taken an unfortunate turn. Treachery has opened our gates to the enemy, and the Shah is at hand. You must be gone. You must away to the Turcomans, so says my father. Make instant preparations."

"How, Zohrab, and without him? Never, never! We live or we die together."

"He will defend us to the last," said Zohrab, "and when all hope is gone, then we will make good our retreat through the secret gate. Delay not—make every preparation—take as little as you can with you, and be ready for flight at a moment's notice."

To this the sapient matron consented; but when her wishes were made known to the women slaves, and to Mariam, the distress that ensued was beyond her power of control. So fearful was Zohrab of being softened by them, that leaving the harem in haste, he rushed back to his father, who by this time had ascended the summit of one of the towers which flanked the gate of the Ark, and accompanied by his most devoted followers, was taking a survey of the heart-rending scene before him, and contemplating, with a steady and determined mind, the fate that he saw would inevitably be his. The *maidan* or square was now entirely occupied by the king's troops under the command of Shir Khan; and although they had not lost time in making a demonstration to force the gates of the citadel, still it was evident they were only waiting the arrival of the Shah in person, before they put the finishing hand to their conquest. Already, however, the work of pillage and devastation had begun; every where the unresisting inhabitants were flying from before the furious soldiery, and cries of distress and misery were heard issuing from every quarter. Soon after, a rush of brilliantly equipped cavaliers, the Gholamhai Shah, or royal body guard, so renowned in Persian courts, announced the speedy arrival of the Shah, and he was seen slowly proceeding through the avenues of the city, with cautious and suspicious eye looking right and left, like the tiger surrounded by objects of prey, but uncertain upon which to make his first spring. A small tent had been hastily pitched for him, and carpets spread, and there he alighted amidst the shouts of sycophants and the greetings of servile mollahs. The anxious crowd opened in a half circle before him, his officers of state stood around, and, like the suspended exhibitions on a theatre, it appeared as if the actors were only waiting his commands to begin again. At length, Shir Khan was seen dismounting from his horse to make his obeisance to the monarch, and pointing towards the gate of the

Ark, was evidently asking the king's permission to commence the attack.

All this was passing under the immediate eye of Zaul, and every moment he was more convinced that Asterabad was lost to him and his family for ever, and that further resistance would be as useless as unavailing. But still he was resolved to sell his life as dearly as possible. "My son," said Zaul, as he turned to Zohrab, "let me embrace thee once more—for this is our last meeting. Do not let thy father's corpse fall into the hands of his enemy—protect thy mother; and after the great Allah and his holy prophet—honour thyself."

Zohrab heard these words with the tenderness and devotion of a son, and with the dignity of a man and a hero. "We are in God's hands," he said, "to whatever he ordains, let us bend our heads in submission." Upon this they mutually drew their swords; and repeating the *bismillah*, with the fervour and determination of martyrs, they gave each other a long and lingering embrace.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

—“ Then on my bending back
The welcome load of my dear father take.”

DRYDEN'S VIRGIL.

AFTER the defeat of the royal army at the attack of the Tehran gate, the Shah had solemnly sworn on the Koran and by his own head, that he would deliver up the city for three successive days to the pillage of his troops; and that he would not be satisfied unless at the end of that time twenty mauns of human eyes were placed before him. Humanity shudders at this recital, but true it is that in Persia, now as in ancient times, the extraction of eyes was always a punishment resorted to when death was not inflicted. Noses and ears were also frequently commanded to be brought before the conqueror, upon sacking a city;

eyes almost always. When he entered the city, this terrible mandate was spread abroad, and it may be imagined that those who had been instrumental in opening the gate to his troops, now, but too late, perceived their mistake, and recollect ed with anguish the prophetic words of their magnanimous governor. The Shah's hatred of Zaul and his family had risen in proportion to the resistance which he had encountered. His haughty spirit could not look back upon what he had suffered—his mortification at Tehran, the loss of his guns, and more than all, the overthrow which he had so recently received—without feeling a thirst for vengeance, which nothing but their blood could assuage, and he determined never to sheathe his sword until, dead or alive, he had both father and son in his possession.

Plunder had commenced ere the Shah entered the city, but he did not give his final sanction to the ensuing violence until, as we have already related, he dismounted from his horse and seated himself in his tent. There, surrounded by his principal officers, by the traitor Mirza Shireen Ali, and the mollabs of the city, his face beaming with ferocious malignity, he pronounced the awful sentence of the *katl-i-aum*, or general massacre, and to give it an appearance of lawful and religious severity, he caused a firman for that purpose to be issued, sanctioned by a *fetvah* of the *Mushtched* of Persia. Moreover, by way of giving greater weight to his commands, or of more completely reviling his fallen foe, he commanded the Asterabad *ullemah*, or priesthood, also to apply their seals of approbation to this document of mockery.

Then might be heard the uplifted voices of a whole city in malediction of the tyrant. The sounds of forcible entrance into houses, the cries of their inhabitants, the mother bereft of her children, children of their parents ; all the accumulated horrors of a licentious soldiery, not only uncontrolled but ordained, were let loose upon the unoffending people, and scenes so horrible took place, that we willingly draw a veil over them, lest the feelings, as well as the incredulity of our readers should be excited.*

It was more immediately upon those who had taken refuge in the citadel, where the very essence of his enemies would be,

* See the History of the Siege of Kerman, in Malcolm's History of Persia' Svo. vol. ii. p. 124.

that the Shah was burning to let loose the myrmidons of his revenge. The advance of Shir Khan, at the head of his detachment, after he had entered the Resht gate, had been so rapid, that Zaul and Zohrab had found it impossible to break down the bridge which led into the Ark, and thus the ditch round the fort became useless as a defence. They had in vain attempted to dislodge those of their opponents, who had taken possession of both bridge and ditch, and it was evident that as soon as a decided and general attack could be effected upon the gates, they must fall. The efforts which they made, by showering down missiles in order to clear the bridge preparatory to a sally, were remarked by the Shah, and he saw that no decided step could be taken to destroy the gate, until the towers and parapets above were cleared; accordingly, he ordered a detachment of his best Khorassan marksmen to ascend the roof of a mosque which commanded the tower, and thence to fire unceasingly upon those who occupied them.

Zaul's quick eye soon saw this movement, and he also posted some men to meet the Tuffenkhis by corresponding volleys, as soon as they should appear at their prescribed post. Standing near his son, they were conspicuous figures both from below and from the mosque. Although he was evidently acting under an impression of his approaching fate, his coolness and presence of mind never forsook him. With hand extended, he was on the point of ordering a discharge of musketry, when a ball, a ball as if impelled by destiny, struck him so palpably in the heart, that he fell into the arms of his son, closed his eyes from that moment, and never spake more. At this sight a sound of savage exultation was heard from the assembled assailants. The Shah himself saw it, and straightway calling for his horse, mounted, and riding forward he roared out, "Now to the gates—down with them. A hundred tomauns for the head of Zaul, and five hundred for Zohrab alive." The effect was instantaneous. Every one rushed to the spot; the battery of the gates was renewed, and very soon after their downfall was heard with an awful crash.

Zohrab had been abandoned by all save his faithful Ali; for no sooner had those in the Ark remarked how nigh was their destruction at hand, than all sought safety in flight, some in one direction and some in another. He seemed now to have ac-

quired a supernatural vigour and strength. Shot fell thick around him; he heeded them not. He bent over the body of his father with reverential awe. He endeavoured at first to staunch the blood which fell from the wound, but when he saw how hopeless any attempt to restore life would be, he only thought upon his father's last injunctions not to let his body fall a prey to the enemy; and when the crash of the falling gates struck his ears, aided and followed by Ali, he caught his lifeless parent in his arms, and passing the body over his left shoulder, leaving his right hand free to wield his sword, he descended the turret stairs, and entered upon the court leading to the gates of the harem.

He had scarcely reached the end of the first court, when he heard a body of the assailants behind him. The headmost of the throng having caught sight of him tottering under his burthen, immediately a chase of life and death took place in pursuit of him. New life impelled the hard pressed youth, the spirit of his slaughtered father seemed to infuse itself within him, he ran with a swiftness more than human. Ali had preceded him to secure the opening of the harem gates. One among the assailants, more active than the rest, most excited by the hopes of securing the prescribed prize, was close upon him—a race, such as had never been seen between men, was running—cupidity on one side, filial love on the other; the audacious soldier was about seizing upon the almost exhausted Zohrab, when our hero suddenly stopped, turned, and ere his pursuer could recover himself, uplifting his unerring scimitar, he dealt him such a blow, that it cleft him in twain, and by this act materially stopped the progress of others, who were following upon the same track. Zohrab then succeeded in entering, and immediately closed the gates of his present security upon the tide of rushing and ruthless foes.

Panting and faint from exhaustion, he carefully laid down his precious burthen—but what pen can describe the scene which followed. There was the body of the slain father extended on the ground, whilst the son, pale with fatigue, covered over with the blood of his parent, looked like another corpse—then came the distracted widow—the half-crazed mother, followed by the other women, who, upon seeing the body of their

beloved master, uttered such screams, such heart-rending cries, that the assailants without suspended their violence, and respected the bitterness of the woe which struck their ears from within.

However, much time was not given to the woe-stricken family for the indulgence of their grief. The sounds of forcible entrance soon made themselves manifest, and roused Zohrab into action. At once regaining possession of his presence of mind, he hushed every cry by his commanding tone and manner. Tenderly embracing his mother, he urged her immediate departure by the secret gate, which leading at once into the jungle, she would there meet with an escort of Turcoman horse, who would convey her and suite without delay to a place of safety. He confided her to the protection of Ali. Having carefully wrapt his father's body in a sheet, it was first conveyed down the staircase, leading through a small turret to the postern, and then, having insisted upon the unhesitating departure of every one, he promised his mother that he would only stay long enough to defend the harem, until she was too distant for pursuit, and then would not fail to join her in person.

Mirza Shireen Ali, the traitor, who well knew the avenues of the citadel as those of the harem, had been amongst the foremost to enter therein, hoping that by seizing Zohrab, he might secure the price which the Shah had set upon his person; accordingly, when he had seen him chased within the gates of the harem, he ascended the walls by a certain ruined inlet, whence he could observe the secret gate, from which he was sure Zaul's family, conducted by Zohrab, would endeavour to escape. He reached that point just as the disconsolate widow, conducting her husband's corpse, had succeeded in gaining the opposite side of the city ditch—but he saw not Zohrab; his exultation was great when he found that the prize might still be his, for evidently he was yet within the harem, and he immediately decided that if he could but close the postern, that object would be secured. He pointed out that circumstance to one of the towns-people, who had followed him in the hope also of securing the prize. By a steep and crooked path they descended, and heaping up stones effectually closed the gate. This was no sooner done, than Mirza Shireen returned to the attack car-

rying on upon the gates of the harem, raising the hopes of the assailants by assuring them that their prey was still within, for that he had ascertained his family alone had left it.

By this time the Shah in person had arrived, when a renewed attack began, and with so much vigour, that the gates began to give way. Zohrab now thought it right to secure his escape. Sole tenant of a dwelling in which he had first drawn breath, he looked around him for the last time with feelings of gloom, whilst enemies were beating at the gate seeking his blood; and unwilling to quit a spot so dear to him, he lingered and looked, and looked again, when at length the falling gates told him it was time to retreat. Confident that none but himself was acquainted with the avenues leading to the postern, he leisurely took his way thither, whilst he heard the enemy in full possession of his paternal mansion.

But to his surprise he heard a rush of footsteps exactly in the direction in which he was himself proceeding:—he hastened onward—still he was followed. Every intricacy seemed to be as well known to his followers as to himself, and when he had reached the entrance of the small turret, he turned about, and to his surprise he saw Mirza Shireen, followed by a large body of soldiery. At once he determined to sell his life as dearly as possible, but still retreated down the stairs, narrow and confined as they were, in the hope that having once gained the door, by his superior activity he might easily escape from his pursuers. He perceived the head of the column of his pursuers at the top just as he had reached the bottom. To his surprise the gate, which but so short a time since had been left open by his mother, was closed; he rushed on to open it, and to his still greater surprise, he found it strongly fastened. Then, indeed, despair seized him, and he felt that he had but a short time to live. Again and again he lent his whole strength to the gate, but it was not in the power of man to stir it. He looked up, and saw that his antagonists still lingered at the top of the stairs, evidently afraid to approach him. One was urging on the other. The lion was at bay, and not a dog had the courage to face him. At length, the voice of the sycophant and traitor Mirza Shireen, was heard, saying—“Zohrab Khan, as you love life—as you would not die—hear the words of a friend. By

Allah! I say true! Lay down your sword, and receive the Shah's pardon—I am your surety."

"Dog and traitor," exclaimed Zohrab, "hold thy treacherous tongue. Open a pass for me, or by the word of a desperate man I will cleave thy soul in twain." Then making one more desperate effort to see whether he could not force the door, and finding it vain, he fiercely grasped his sword afresh, and showed symptoms of making an attack upon the cowards above. He was about making good his threat, when a voice which once heard never could be mistaken—the voice of the Shah himself was distinguished above the rest, urging the lingering soldiers to the attack of the solitary Zohrab. There was now a compact crowd on the head of the stairs, still with Mirza Shireen and his hypocrite face in front. "Sons of burnt fathers," roared the Shah, "are ye afraid of one man? Seize, but do not kill him!" A movement of attack was manifest, still no one would venture to be the first. At length Zohrab, with despair in his heart and resolution in his countenance, rushed blindly upward, sword in hand, and fearlessly attacked the whole collected mob. The first who fell a sacrifice to his fury was the traitor, who at one blow paid the forfeit of his wickedness. Upon this the crowd retreated. The Shah's voice was again heard. At length his assailants, finding it impossible to seize him alive, devised the effectual mode of overwhelming him with large masses of masonry. Heavy blocks were impelled down the stairs, until at length a ponderous stone coming in contact with his temple, he fell stunned, and immediately the dastardly crew fastened upon his every limb; and thus entirely overpowered, he hopelessly became their prisoner.

He was dragged with exulting shouts through the passages leading to the narrow staircase, advantage having been taken of his state of insensibility to tie his arms and hands strongly behind his back. Despoiled of his sword, and reeling onward, partly from faintness and from intensity of pain, he was thus dragged before the king. The aspects which these two individuals presented were indeed as different as they could be. The one surrounded by power, flushed with conquest, thirsting for revenge; the other alone and helpless, and though pale and disfigured by the contest which he had sustained, covered with

blood and mutilated by wounds, still bore a dignified and undaunted presence, and though a vile and ignominious death was impending, still neither by word or look did he betray the smallest submission to the tyrant.

The Shah returned to his pavilion in the maidan until the palace in the Ark should be in readiness for his reception, and there, surrounded by his principal officers, he received his fallen prisoner.

"You are again in our power," said the Shah; "but no longer a hostage;—by the blessing of the Prophet that day has gone by! Look upon that sun which now shineth, and well—for 'tis thy last."

"Kill me now," said Zohrab? "then I shall die without being grateful to thee for any thing."

"Strike the wretch on the mouth, should he speak again," said the Shah, his wrath rising at the sight of the independent bearing of his prisoner.

"I have but one more word to say," said Zohrab, "before *inshallah*, I leave this life: stop the blood which is now spilling;—order thy ruthless soldiers to sheath their swords, and spare the people who are innocent;—let Zohrab be their atoning sacrifice. If they have erred, 'tis by our example;—if they have resisted thee, 'tis by our ordinance. If thou hast a heart, let my words reach it; and if thou hast a soul, let the fear of a future life and future retribution overtake it."

"Dog," said the Shah, "wilt thou preach to me? Can the cur approach the lion otherwise than by licking his feet."

"Dog, sayest thou?" retorted Zohrab; "dog and father of dogs art thou thyself, tyrant and murderer! Do thy worst upon me—I revile thee."

The vivid paleness of rage became sensibly visible in the countenance of the Shah, as the words of the prisoner struck his ear. He would instantly have given way to his wrath, and ordered immediate execution, but he saw through Zohrab's real wish of instant death, and would not indulge him. He ordered him away from his presence, saying—"Thy moment is not yet come—our revenge is not yet complete—thy end shall be as public and as ignominious as thy life has been rebellious. Bear him off, and hear:—let his confinement be so strict, that the Shah will be jealous if even a ray of light visits him."

Upon this order, the executioner's gang seized upon their victim, and in the face of the wonder-struck crowd, who bowed their heads in submission to the Shah's power in proportion to the fallen state in which they saw his enemy, they dragged him off with every species of contumely towards that mansion, of which, but the day before, he had been the lord and master. They then lodged him in certain under-ground chambers, originally intended for prisoners, but which, during the mild rule of Zaul Khan, had seldom known the presence of a prisoner. They there left him, condemned to the fate of a common malefactor, giving him the bare ground for a bed, with the mere sustenance of bread and water, whilst heavy chains encumbered his body.

In the meanwhile the work of devastation was proceeding with unabated fury throughout the city. Frequently would those who surrounded the Shah, watch the expression of his face, hoping it would exhibit some symptoms of remorse, in order that they might throw in a word of intercession, but hitherto in vain. Once Sadek ventured to say, as increasing supplies of eyes were brought in by the executioners, "As I am your sacrifice, your slave has made the calculation, and the number is complete. God grant it may be so!"

"Ill born that you are!" said the unfeeling tyrant, "if it be not complete, thy eyes shall add to the number. Why wilt thou stay the hand of justice?"

After this no one dared open their lips; but with despair in their hearts, they stood in silence before him, whilst ever and anon, as some sounds of lamentation more than usually doleful and clamorous struck his ear, they imagined that in a more thoughtful mood he began to feel the workings of humanity in his breast. A wretch of an executioner, a savage of most ferocious aspect, his arms bared to the shoulders, his hands crimson with blood, and his beard clotted with foam, had just brought in a tray covered with eyes, and placed them before the Shah. There he stood, in an attitude of exultation, expecting the usual donation. The Shah, contemplating the horrid objects for some time, at length drew his small riding whip from his girdle, and with the handle thereof began to count them, telling them off by pairs, and in doing this he broke out into the following soliloquy: "Oh Allah! is it in truth right and just to

continue thus to send thy wrath upon an offending and rebellious people!" Upon this the Grand Vizir, whose heart could no longer withstand its impulse for intercession, stepped forward, fell upon his knees, and touching his forehead to the ground, exclaimed, "*Ahi*, my king and master, God loves compassion. Blessed are they, sayeth our holy Koran, who love mercy and enforce it; let thy slave intercede for the poor wretches, who have no other fault than being inhabitants of this city."

The perverseness of the Shah's mind, acting upon his hot and ardent nature, was like a parasitical plant, which is seen to entwine itself, cover over, and take possession of a large tree in the forests of tropical climates; for upon hearing the words of the Vizir, the savage monarch turned up his blood-seeking eyes, and instead of being moved by the humility of his minister, exclaimed sarcastically, "Art thou too throwing words in the air? Begone, look after thy mirzas and scribes, and leave the sword where it ought to be." Upon which Hajji Ibrahim with dignity made his lowest obeisance, and left the presence a much less zealous and devoted servant than before he received this rebuke.

Among the great congregation of people who had surrounded the Shah's tent during the scene of Zohrab's condemnation, a woman closely veiled had been remarked, almost the only one who had ventured into a crowd at once so lawless and so submissive. This was Zulma; although her views had been so much raised by the position in which she had been placed by the Shah, that the tender feelings of love had almost been obliterated by those of ambition, yet when she again saw Zohrab, so great in his fall, so fitted to interest a woman's affection, and particularly such a creature of impulse as Zulma, all her former love for him returned, and her only wish now was to free him from his bonds, and to fly with him to any spot, however remote, where she might enjoy his gratitude, and secure a return of her passion. She retreated to the dwelling which had been assigned her, pensive and impatient. She determined first to try how far she might persuade the Shah to save his life, and then, if she did not succeed, to devise other schemes for his release. Accordingly, at night, when, after the fatigues and anxieties of the day, the king called her before him to solace himself by her conver-

sation, she began by degrees to try her ground ere she ventured to make her request.

"The *takdeer* of the king of kings, after all," said she, "is something unheard of in the annals of our country. For who in truth was equal to Zohrab in heroism? still here he is kissing the feet of the Shah."

"You say true," said the Shah, who was never better pleased than when he was called a favourite of fortune. "Wisdom is something! but good luck is all in all!"

"And by the blessing of Allah!" said the designing maiden, "all anxiety for Asterabad and its rebellious subjects is now over. The Shah has only the one thought now of reaping the best fruits of his victory!"

"Yes!" said the king, "let them behave well in future, and he will raise their heads to the skies!"

"They will ever provide a fine race of warriors to the Shah, at least," said Zulma; "as for instance—if that ill-fated Zohrab had not been such a rebel and so *wajeb el catt*, so necessary to slay, what a leader of the king's troops would he not make?"

"In truth, yes," said the king, half angry at having been drawn into such a confession. "He would be a fine soldier any where, but he dreams of any thing but submission—he looks for dominion—such a thing must not live."

"His whole existence is now changed," said Zulma; "the air has escaped from his brain; without that unsainted father of his, who in truth was a misfortune, he will in future take to quiet as his last resource."

"The time has gone by," said the king, suspicious of his companion's views. "Had he done this whilst he was a hostage, well—but now, men will laugh if the Shah spares him. He dies—be it now, or be it in a short time hence—the thread of his destiny is spun out, and Irân will no longer possess her Zohrab."

Catching at this delay, which she had not even anticipated, Zulma said every thing she could to promote it, hoping that some occurrence might, in the meanwhile, take place to save his life, and with that hope she retired for the night. During the short time she had enjoyed the king's countenance, she had succeeded in acquiring great influence over him. Whether

that tincture of energy and violence which was mixed up with all her thoughts and actions, was pleasing to him, set off, as it was, by great beauty, and directed frequently by much adroitness; or whether it is the nature of man, even the most wayward and the most self-willed, to cede to a counter-violence, proceeding, as it did in this instance, from an inferior and a dependent; true it is, that he permitted her to speak more openly to him than any other person, and reposing upon the obligations which were heaped upon herself and family, he ventured to refresh his mind by expressions of confidence, which manifested the trust he reposed in her fidelity.

He had long been expecting the arrival of his nephew and successor. He felt that their meeting would be one of much difficulty; for how could he talk to him with proper temper upon the loss of his sister! He longed that Fatteh Ali might reach him at the present moment, when his feelings were awakened to their utmost pitch of excitement, for then he knew he could extricate himself by words of violence, and by commands which would impose silence even upon the most refractory. He knew the effect which a victorious king produced upon the minds of the Persian people, and foresaw that it would now be reflected back upon the mind of his young relative, whatever might be the frame of mind in which he would arrive. Besides, had he not the very man in his custody on whose account his sister had met with her fate, and he felt upon that ground alone he would be able successfully to meet his nephew.

Upon this subject he had explained his mind to Zulma, and it had been the means of opening another source of ambition to her. She had frequently heard of the excellencies of the youthful Prince—of the beauty of his person, of the intelligence of his mind, of his dexterity at all manly exercises; and when she gave full scope to her imagination, she could dream of the possibility of becoming the banou of his harem, and of swaying the councils of a king of Persia, as she had formerly taken the lead in the chief executioner's household. Thus was her wayward and unsettled mind tossed between three ideas:—the first, that of becoming the actual arbitress of the fate of Persia, by her influence and control over its present sovereign; the second, of being united to the heir apparent to the throne, and thus be-

coming the wife of the most attractive of men—the most envied of women; and thirdly, taking advantage of her present situation, to save and secure the affections of him who alone really filled her thoughts, and who was in fact the one object of her adoration.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Ev'n he, this youth—though dimm'd and gone
 Each star of hope that cheer'd him on—
 His glories lost—his cause betray'd—
 Irân, his dear-loved country, made
 A land of carcasses and slaves.

LALLA ROOKH.

As soon as the horrors of the *katl-i-aum* had subsided, the Shah left his tents and took possession of Zaul's palace. Although there is much prejudice among Persians against inhabiting the home of one who has met the death which Zaul had encountered (for even a son objects living in the same house in which his father died), yet in this instance, for certain political reasons, the Shah thought it right to overlook all difficulties. He wished to exhibit himself to the Asterabadis as their sovereign, and to sit in the place which they had been accustomed to revere as the seat of their governor. He knew the effect which such an act would produce upon the minds of a people who bend the head to outward signs of power, and he was moreover anxious to let it be known among the Turcomans, how totally the rule of their late ally had been supplanted, and that it was to himself for the future they must look for protection.

The whole building had been completely cleansed—the fountains were made to play—the royal carpets were spread, and at an hour authorised by the astrologers, the Shah took his seat in the *dewan khaneh* of the palace, which had held within its walls the great Shah Abbas, its original founder, and many

of the succeeding princes of that line. Here he received the congratulations of his courtiers and warriors upon the occasion of his conquest, to which, real or commanded, were added those of the priesthood of Asterabad, who put up prayers for his prosperity.

Zulma, at the same time, was installed in the women's apartments of the palace. Had her ambition been less, her feelings might have been greatly excited by the reflection that she now occupied the birthplace of the man she so ardently admired—that here, under the eyes of his parents, he had risen into manhood, and that his home, so dear to him, at a blow had been driven to the four winds of heaven. Her feelings, however, were intensely roused, when she was told that in certain *zeerzemeens*, underground cells, contiguous to her dwelling, the object of her love and solicitude himself was now in confinement. This intelligence induced a restlessness and a desire to see him, which no reasoning could conquer. In vain she apprehended the risks she might run of the Shah's displeasure in case she were discovered; nothing could stop her determination, and happen what might she resolved to visit him. It is true that she possessed every facility for so doing, and there was no likelihood that the step she was about to take would be known; for the prisoner had been given into the custody of her father; and every one of his servants, his deputy and all, were her devoted slaves, and indeed now doubly so, since she occupied her present eminent situation.

The females who composed her household were few, for she had neither had time nor opportunity to surround herself by those numerous officers usual to persons in her situation, therefore she feared no detection from their scrutiny. She managed so well that the man on guard over the prisoner should be peculiarly devoted to her will, who would give her an immediate entrance to his cell; she determined that very night, after her usual audience with the king, to seek the unfortunate Zohrah in his confinement.

It was past midnight, the whole city at rest, and not a sound heard, when, covering herself closely with her veil, Zulma, at the small gate of the harem, waited for her conductor. He came at the prescribed time, and taking his way through a long

avenue, which led into a court once occupied by the slaves of Zaul Khan's establishment, he descended into a low and vaulted chamber, which formed a sort of ante-room to the prison in which Zohrab was confined. Its walls were of great thickness, and there was a chill of damp and mould about them, which gave the approach to the prisons an air of utter wretchedness. She took the small lantern which her guide held in his hand, into her own, and as he unbarred the heavy door of the prison, she bade him remain without until her business with the prisoner should be at an end.

The greatest misery which Zohrab had experienced since he had been placed in confinement, was the delay allowed to take place ere he was deprived of life. When his thoughts turned upon himself, and he retraced in his mind the different paths through which his short life had travelled, his recollections presented nothing that could wound his spirit; but when he turned his recollections to the miseries that had overwhelmed his family, the recent and awful death of his father, and the exiled and destitute state of his mother, to which was added the bitter retrospect of his Amima's death, his heart gave way to the deepest anguish, and the vaulted roof of his prison rang with the occasional bursts of his grief.

It was one of these bursts that caught the ear of Zulma as she was about entering the prison. She paused in an attitude of attention ere she ventured to proceed. At length, holding the lamp over her eyes, in order to discover in the darkness where the wretched youth lay, she slowly opened the door and entered. Zohrab, who thought that his hour was come, soon turned his grief into joy as he caught the first glimpse of the light; but when he perceived a woman's form approaching, he began to think that it might be a vision of his brain, and starting from his stony bed with a wild and astonished air, his bright eyes looking through a countenance disfigured by neglect and worn by fatigue, he said in a tone of great seriousness—"In the name of Allah, who are you?—what seek you?"

"Zohrab," said Zulma, struck with awe at the solemnity of the scene, "am I unknown to you? Is Zulma nothing in your eyes?"

"Ahi," said Zohrab, immediately regaining his self-posses-

sion ; “ what interest can one so prosperous find in one so wretched ? Is the lady Zulma come to mock the misery of a fallen man ? ”

“ *Astaferallah,* ” said Zulma, highly touched at seeing the miserable state of the once powerful Zohrab. “ I am come, ” said she, “ to offer you consolation. I am your friend ; — there is much to hope if Zohrab will bow the heart of pride before the hand of power. Zulma can do much. ”

“ Life is of too little value, lady, to one so wretched, that I should now give it up to slavery and ignominy. I have but one object left to desire, and that is the welfare of my mother. If you can help me to secure that, you will have the satisfaction of receiving the thanks and the gratitude of a dying man. ”

“ Is there none else in the world, ” said Zulma, mortified at what she looked upon as a poor compliment to herself, “ for whom you wish to live ? Has the devotion of one who places herself at your feet no attractions for you ? ”

“ What words are these ? ” said Zohrab, roused by recollections of what it had been the study of his life to suppress. “ All secrets are vain now — death will soon wipe away from the mind of man the recollection of either the murdered Amima, or the to-be-murdered Zohrab. Had she been alive, then indeed would the wretch before you have kissed the dust of your feet to save him ; — but she is gone. What joys can life promise him without her — no, lady, no, — leave me to die. ”

Zulma, stung to the quick by these words, would indeed have left him ; and although she saw that it would be impossible to inspire him with love for her, yet there was that irresistible attraction in his person, heightened as it was by the magnanimity of their resignation under misfortune, that she could not resist lingering on in hope of seeing him relent, and accept of the promise of life which she had held out to him.

“ Think no more of Amima, ” said she ; “ whatever has been, so let it be ; the destinies of individuals are in the hands of God ; but has not Zohrab a heart for two Amimas ? When one day has shut in, and is covered by the shades of night, does not the sun shine on a second ? ”

“ Lady, ” said Zohrab, “ you are talking to one who has already fixed his thoughts upon an hereafter, and who would

rather seek it and its certainties, than all the deceitful pleasures of this world."

Zulma looked at him with astonishment. Her mind could never conceive that such heroism and disregard of the world could exist in any breast: and when she saw this man, in the prime of life, clinging to the hope of death as the one object of his wishes, she could only suppose that his mind had been struck by some talismanic charm, and that imbecility had taken the place of his once vigorous intellect.

She was about taking her departure, when Zohrab raised himself in his chains, and bending himself forward, said, "As you love Allah!—if you be a true believer and a woman!—let the entreaties of one who will shortly be no more, be heard in favour of his wretched, destitute mother!"

The imploring attitude in which he stood—the feeling tone of his entreaty, restored all the tenderness of her feeling. She turned towards him with a rapture which lightened up her features into hope and ecstasy, and she would have shown him to what a degree she loved, when she was met by a coldness that at once told her how vain were her hopes, and that the man before whom she stood could not feign a sentiment which he did not feel. She therefore retreated in confusion, her wrath rising in proportion to the greatness of her disappointment; and leaving the wretched Zohrab to his pride and his solitude, she returned whence she came.

Still upon reflection she hoped that, left to himself, his resolution might alter, and that he might think better of the advantages which she had held out to him. Therefore, she determined to continue her good offices in his favour with the Shah, and, at all events, to stop any pursuit of his mother that might have been ordered, hoping by such an act to secure at least an avenue to his gratitude. She arose the next morning full of these schemes, when she was informed that the Prince Fatteh Ali had just arrived, and her informant added, that to this moment he was totally ignorant of the death of his sister. This greatly turned the current of her thoughts, and she was not wrong in her conclusion that this circumstance must create some extraordinary sensation at court.

In fact, the youth, who my readers may recollect was intro-

duced to their notice at the begining of this our narrative, thoughtless, ardent, and amiable, is now to be brought before them as a formed man. His person, which before was scarcely formed, had acquired strength and squareness. His beard had gained sufficient consistency to become an ornament; and throughout his whole appearance there was a manliness of manner and speech, which spoke at once in his favour. The effect which he produced by his presence at the Shah's court, acted like magic, or like the genial warmth of the sun vivifying a drooping vegetation, which had long languished under the effects of blight. Every one who looked upon him, felt their hearts expand at the idea, that he was destined to be their future ruler, and suppressing the sigh which the horror of their present miseries prompted, could smile with inward hope that the day was not far distant when that iron hand of despotism, which now weighed so hard upon them, might be replaced by the softer touch of the mild prince they now beheld. The sort of tacit adulation which was paid him, was a test of the pleasure which his presence afforded; for it was involuntary and sincere. From the Vizir to the meanest camp-follower, he met with nothing but looks and expressions of welcome; and although they were to him the most flattering testimonies of public approbation which he could receive, yet he was aware how prudent it would be in him rather to avoid than to seek them, knowing the jealous and suspicious temper of his uncle.

The Grand Vizir, the venerable Hajji Ibrahim Khan, looked upon him as his own son. He had acted so entirely as he had wished in the government of the province of Fars, which by wisdom and moderation he had elevated from a state of ruin to one of riches and prosperity, that he cherished him not only as his disciple in the science of government, but also as the promoter of the future glory and happiness of the kingdom at large. He received him with every mark of respect as his future sovereign, and with every testimony of affection as his obedient pupil. But, in so doing, he shuddered at the reflection how cruelly—how bitterly the finer feelings of this noble youth were about to be tortured, by the melancholy intelligence which sooner or later must be disclosed to him. He loved his sister Amima with the fondest love—a sentiment which orphans in their situation could only feel. He had left his government with regret,

but that was counterbalanced by the joyful expectation of holding communication with his beloved sister. It is a custom in Persia, to withhold the news of death from the person most concerned (so much so as to become a business of life and death when it concerns princes and governors) as long as it is possible. Consequently, although the melancholy supposed death of the Shah's niece and banou, was pretty generally known, particularly among men in office, still no one ever ventured to hint it to her brother, and all through his journey, to the very moment of its being disclosed to him at Asterabad, he had actually lived in the hope of meeting her at Tehran.

Sadek was another of those who testified the greatest pleasure at seeing the prince, for however anxious he might feel at the result of the disclosure which would be made to him, still he was so greatly attached to his person, having been from his earliest infancy accessory in bringing him up, that he could not repress his satisfaction at seeing him again. This, however, was greatly mitigated by his fear of the Shah; for, during his long servitude, he had been so constantly obliged to educate the very looks and fashion of his face to the temper and whim of the monarch, that a smile on Sadek's face was as rare an occurrence as a sight of the sun in a northern winter, and demonstrations of either pleasure or pain were as little seen upon it, as wind blowing on the surface of a mirror.

The first desire of the prince was to be admitted into the presence of his uncle. To the tyrant, the news of his arrival gave no pleasure; on the contrary, it excited his ill-humour. He had a sort of intuitive feeling how much he would lose in the comparison which would not fail being made between the king that was, and the king that was to be. Whenever his nephew's name was mentioned, it was accompanied by either actual expressions of approbation, or by such looks of good-will, that the Shah felt that a tacit comparison in the mind of the speaker was then making to his prejudice. The very beauty of his nephew's person, and suavity of his manners, were odious to the uncle, and it was esteemed the worst road to his good-will either to laud or to uphold him in any manner.

Upon his rising on that day, Sadek was the appointed person to apprise the Shah of the arrival of the prince; and fully aware how delicate was the task, considering in how ferocious a mood

his mind would be, he took care to be cautious, and not to let the sunshine which beamed in his breast break out upon his face, but to compose his features into a cast so wooden and unconcerned, that the Shah could not discover what was working within.

With that quickness of perception which was peculiar to him, the Shah having remarked that something had occurred, said to Sadek: "What news is there?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said his servant, "nothing. The Prince Fatteh Ali requests to kiss your feet."

To this, the Shah answered not a word, but continued the operations of the toilet apparently unconcerned. When he was dressed, Sadek expected the order to admit the prince immediately into the presence; but he was surprised to hear the king say that he would receive him at the usual public selam at noon, a mark of such total unconcern, that Sadek supposed the king intended thereby to mark his displeasure at his tardy arrival. But the truth was, that however unconcerned the tyrant might wish to appear, yet in fact a very different feeling actuated him. He dreaded to see his nephew,—he dreaded the explanations which he must make touching his sister's death, and he wished to see him first as an attendant at the public audience, rather than *tête-a-tête*, where the first enquiries which Fatteh Ali would make, would be concerning his sister. And on seeing him there he determined to do what Sadek had suspected, namely to put a slight upon him.

At the usual hour, when all the courtiers, officers of state, warriors, and men of the law, each at their respective posts, were ready in attendance in the great court-yard of the *dewan khaneh*, they perceived the Prince Fatteh Ali make his appearance, almost at the very moment that his uncle was taking his place upon the musnud. He stood respectfully without, and made his obeisance with the rest of those present. The Shah took no more notice of him than he did of any one else; but he could not but be struck at the unequivocal marks of satisfaction which appeared in the faces and manner of all present, at seeing their future sovereign among them. The prince's own demeanour was in every way marked by good sense. He did not manifest any mortification at the mode of his reception, but took his station where he knew from his rank he was entitled to

stand. At length, after the Shah had spoken the usual words of little import to the Grand Vizir, and had given certain directions concerning the police and administration of the city, he turned to the prince, and said, "What news do you bring from Fars? Your progress to our stirrup has been slow."

"By the blessing of Allah," said the prince, "every thing in Fars is well. Your slave travelled post, and his ill destiny has made him arrive too late to meet the Shah's wishes."

This open rebuke, although it hurt the feelings of the prince, did not produce the effect which his uncle expected, that of lowering him in public estimation. On the contrary, the effect was reversed, for never was contrast between two individuals so unsavourable to the one, and so advantageous to the other; for in their persons they exhibited the extremes of beauty and deformity; in their minds, of arrogance and humility; in their manners, of harshness and amenity.

This scene passed off, but was duly commented upon throughout the camp and city, such an unanimous feeling of hatred having arisen against the Shah, strengthened by the possession of one who promised such happiness to the country, that but for the constant habit of fear which kept down rebellion, it is likely that Persia would at that moment have thrown off the yoke. One circumstance which strongly encouraged feelings of discontent, was the non-existence of the humpback, whose activity as a spy throughout every department had made the people cautious of expressing their true sentiments, and whose intrigues had sown distrust between individuals of all ranks. His absence had opened men's hearts and minds, and they now could confess to each other, how impatient they were of the tyranny which oppressed them.

The Shah, on the other hand, felt all he had lost by the death of his servant. Although he had installed Sadek in his office, yet he had not obtained in him what he possessed in the other. Instead of that sharpness of intellect, full of resources in furtherance of its purpose, and which came to conclusions almost by intuition, Sadek possessed but a slow apprehension, neither adapted to the character of a spy or a courtier. When once he had made up a resolution he was firm, nothing could subvert it; but much was required to move him, and although he ever espoused the interests of his master, and served him with fidelity, yet if called

upon to be the instrument of injustice, he did not hesitate either to resist, or to counteract his intention.

The shock which the prince Fatteh Ali had received in the morning, was but trifling to the misery inflicted upon him during the course of this inauspicious day. The Shah, by his conduct at the selam, having prepared both his own and his nephew's mind for scenes of discord, determined to fill up the measure of his woe, by disclosing to him the whole of his misfortune. Accordingly, as the day drew to a close, just before the evening prayer he called him to the *khelvet* or cabinet. He had prepared it with great attention to effect—he made a display of the implements and officers of punishment in the avenues leading to it. The chamber was dimly lighted, and one less stout-hearted than the prince would probably have sunk with apprehension. But conscious in his integrity, without suspicion, the youth proceeded to his uncle's presence, though but little prepared for the ensuing scene.

"Come forward," said the Shah, as he entered, the Shah being seated in the corner of a small room, lighted up by only two long tapers in the midst, and covered with a cloak of a dark colour.

"You have no doubt heard wherefore we have called you to our presence," said he, in a tone very different from what a nephew might expect from so near a relation.

"As I am your sacrifice," said the prince, "the reason has not been made known to me."

"Has no one by the road side hinted the reason of your recall?"

"By the head of the king, no," he answered. "Not till this very morning was your servant aware that he had incurred the Shah's displeasure. In the administration of his province he has followed every instruction which he has received, and, by the blessing of Allah! the plains which were before uninhabited are now flourishing; the Shah's *maliat*, or revenue, has increased, and owing to the royal wisdom men are happy at Shiraz. If the tardy arrival of your slave is the reason, by the salt of the king, and by the head of the Prophet, I swear that I never tarried longer on the road than to rest myself and horses, that I did not even abide a day at Ispahan; that I did

not go to Tehran, where I might have heard some account of my sister, for whom alone I think life worth the keeping ; and that I came on in the greatest possible haste, as soon as I heard of the state of the war in Asterabad. What more can your servant say ?”

The king sat in silence for some time, uncertain even to the last in what manner to break the horrid intelligence to his nephew. He was disappointed that he entertained not even a suspicion of Amima’s death, and found that he had to undergo the whole misery of a first disclosure. At length, crushing every good feeling which in spite of himself would rise to the surface of his thoughts, he determined to have recourse to his constant refuge in all difficulties of conscience,—to assert the despot and the tyrant.

“ The reason of your recall has no reference to the business of government,” said the Shah ; “ upon that head we have nothing to say—but it is one which touches you still nearer. It is the conduct of your sister.”

“ Allah ! Allah !” cried the astonished youth, “ what can she have done ?”

“ Hear !” said the Shah, evidently much agitated. “ I have treated you both as my children—you as the heir to my throne —she as the head of my house, my companion, and my confidant. What did I ever keep secret from her ? Did she not know my inmost thoughts ? Did she not even lead me as a child ? Was there a favour which I ever refused her ? Had she not her will in every way ? and in that most ill-fated event when she met the unsainted Mazanderani youth, a proceeding which, according to the rules of Mahomedan life, would have carried her condemnation with it in any other harem—did I not forgive her freely, and bury every thing in oblivion ?”

“ As Mahomed is the prophet of Allah this is all new to me !” said the astounded Fatteh Ali.

“ Give ear and have patience,” said the king. “ What will you say when I tell you, that notwithstanding this indulgence, in the very face of her duty to me, of her obedience to the injunctions of our holy prophet, she was convicted (can I find words to say it), she was convicted of receiving this very Mazanderani in her apartments !”

"That I declare," roared out the prince in voice of thunder, "is false! Amima has refused to embrace me, her brother—would she debase herself with one she knew not?"

"Hold, young man," said the Shah, having been sufficiently roused by the violence of his nephew's manner; "hear me to the last."

"What have you done with her?", said the prince, with a tone in which contempt and tenderness were mingled. "Have ye murdered her?"

"As you value your own life, be silent!" said the king, his passions kindling into a flame. "Your sister has paid the forfeit of her crime—she is no more!"

"Curses be on your head! murderer of your own blood!" said the indignant and grief-stricken youth, his words choking his utterance, and leaning against the wall from sudden weakness; "May the maledictions of an orphan fall upon your head! Slayer of my father and your brother, murderer of my sister, add my murder to the list of your crimes, and it will be well!" and without further thought concerning the dreaded man before whom he stood, he turned his back upon him, and left his presence.

The Shah's excited passion by this time had broken out into one of the most violent paroxysms of a tyrant's fury—his face was convulsed—his frame shook with rage—words could not issue from his eager mouth. At length the last act of the prince's contempt restored him to his full utterance, and roaring out in the voice of a demon to his attendant officers, he said, "Seize him! bind him! Sadek, as you value your life, go thrust that dog's son into utter darkness. By the head of the Shah, we will have revenge! After all, am I not a king?"

With the greatest reluctance, Sadek, accompanied by two ferashes, took the heart-broken prince into custody, at the same time showing him every respect in their power, whilst he followed without exhibiting the smallest resistance.

The Shah had not been in the least prepared for this result to the conference. He had never conceived it possible that his nephew possessed sufficient strength of character to brave his power, and therefore he was in every way astonished; and when he recollects how popular he was among all ranks, how favourable had been the reception which he had met from his officers

and courtiers, he began seriously to reflect that consequences of far greater import to himself than merely a young man's grief at the loss of his sister, might rise up against him, and make that power uncertain which he now wielded with so much uncontrol. He sat in long cogitation at this new feature which his affairs had taken, and the more he reflected upon what had just taken place, the more his passions were roused.

His jealousy, his envy, his indignation, and his desire for revenge, all by turns assailed his miserably-conducted feelings. His first impulse was to get rid of the youth immediately by open violence, reckless of the consequence; his more sober resolutions pointed to prudence and the absence of publicity. Long he thought, and long he remained undecided. At length he determined to delay, in order to ascertain what turn his nephew's feelings would assume after their first ebullition had subsided, ere he came to any ultimate decision on his account. Upon his death he was resolved, but it was only upon how it could best be effected that he was uncertain.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"Neither slay the soul which God hath forbidden you to slay, unless for a just cause.

KORAN.

THE wretched Fatteh Ali was inconsolable at the horrid intelligence which had so cruelly been communicated to him. The circumstance which principally afflicted him, was the imputation cast upon his sister's reputation. He had been bred up in the highest respect for the sanctity of the harem, and the honour of women. The love which he had always entertained for his sister, was entwined with such confidence in her purity, that by no stretch of his imagination could he conceive her guilty of the crimes of which his uncle had accused her. There was no one from whom he could seek consolation; he was debarred from

communicating with any of those who professed friendship for him, and in his forlorn situation, the only possible issue from his misfortunes, he saw was death. Sadek alone was allowed to attend upon him, for the Shah was anxious to know whether his nephew had relented, and he had given orders that every word and action should be reported to him. To him the prince freely imparted his feelings. Instead of retracting what he had said to the Shah, his tongue did not cease heaping curses upon his head; he did not refrain from calling him a fratricide; a destroyer of his own blood; a blot in the human race; a foul and base tyrant; and when his imagination would allow itself to think upon the agonies which he probably had inflicted upon his sister, he became furious, and was afflicted by the ravings and contortions of a maniac. Sadek's better nature longed to relieve the wretched youth from his misery, intimately acquainted as he was with every part of Amima's history; but he was so fearful lest any thing which he might say should compromise his own safety with the Shah, that he determined at first to profess ignorance, asserting that every thing had taken place within the walls of the harem; that the Khajeh Bashi having been put to death, the whole event was consigned to eternal secrecy.

But he felt it difficult totally to elude the prince's enquiries, who pressed him hard upon every point, first concerning Amima's acquaintance with Zohrab, next as to the possibility of his entering the harem, then upon the nature of the discovery, and lastly upon her death. To all this, Sadek at first pretended ignorance; but the prince knowing that Mariam was his sister's attendant, he would not let him rest until he had sifted every particular. At length the inflexibility of the man gave way before the urgent entreaties of the youth, and, as far as he could with prudence, he gave as detailed a narrative as possible of what had befallen her, in which he made a full exposition of her innocence.

To the admirers of genuine feeling, it would have afforded much delight to witness the conduct of the prince upon hearing this intelligence; a load appeared to have been withdrawn from his breast: his features gradually brightened up; tears streamed from his eyes; and when he was assured, that though death had been her fate, yet that no imputation could be attached to her, he rushed to his informant, and almost embracing his knees,

exclaimed "Blessings on you for this ! you have raised a poor wretch from hell to heaven. Let death come now, and I shall die content. The sooner the odious tyrant strikes, the better; go, go, tell him so ! Tell him he is the murderer of innocence, and that I defy him to do me more harm, than to add my death to the catalogue of his crimes."

Sadek hastened to take advantage of this permission to go, for he felt that in a few minutes more he would have confessed every thing. The affecting situation of the prince had so worked upon his nature, rude and reserved as it was, that in order to give him the comfort which he so much required, he would have told him of his sister's safety ; but had he done so, he knew the consequences would probably be fatal to himself, as well as to those whom he had saved ; he therefore determined to do all in his power to prevent the king from coming to extremities with his nephew, and for that purpose armed himself with more than usual patience, determined to bear with the king's wrath and ill-humour to the utmost ; and more than all, he was resolved rather to sacrifice his own life, than again to be made the instrument of taking away that of one so innocent as the prince.

In the morning, the Shah called him in attendance earlier than usual, desirous to know whether his nephew continued in the same mood as on the evening before. Sadek, anxious to screen him from violence, endeavoured to place his situation in the best possible point of view ; he described the violence of his grief, showed how necessary it was to give him time to recover the severity of the blow, and assured the king that he himself would be guarantee that the prince would in time be as docile to his wishes as ever. This temporizing plan did not, however, meet the Shah's views ; he never forgot injurious words, and he remembered too well all that had been said on the preceding evening, to pass so easily from wrath to forgiveness. Besides, he did not in the least relish the tone of apology and exculpation which Sadek had adopted in the prince's favour. All the jealousy of his nature was roused, because he thought in that tone he could read the feeling of the public. Suspicion alone of that nature would have been fatal to any one, but how much more to him who now stood forward in some measure as his rival!

He determined himself to ascertain the state of his nephew's mind, and therefore peremptorily ordered him to appear. The interview was almost a repetition of what passed on the preceding evening. Instead of expressing contrition for the expressions he had used, the prince, apprised as he had been of his sister's innocence, was now only more severe in his remarks upon the Shah's barbarity. The feelings of horror which more or less had always filled his breast against his uncle, although he had hitherto repressed them, now broke out in full violence; and so entirely did he rouse the Shah's passions, that but for the despot's prudence, which in the midst of wrath he ever preserved, the prince would at that moment have paid the forfeit of his life. The Shah ordered him from his presence with all the instances of ignominy which attend a common malefactor, and for the present, contracting his rage within his own breast, he said nothing. However, he fully made up his mind rather to leave his throne without a successor, than to make the actual possession of it insecure, and death, in his mind, was the sealed fate of the unfortunate prince.

Again he sought the assistance of Sadek, for in him he hoped to possess an ever ready instrument of his vengeance. Seated in his own private apartment, he ordered every one to leave the room, excepting Sadek; and then, with that look of mystery and ominous import which he could put on upon sanguinary occasions, he said:

"Sadek, my liver is turned into blood—the king's name is trampled upon. This must not be—Fatteh Ali dies."

Sadek stood like one petrified, and kept a profound silence.

"Did you hear?" said the Shah; "from thee the Shah requires his blood."

Upon these words, this naturally impassive man fell rudely and boldly at the Shah's feet, and said, "Your slave is too great a lover of his Shah to commit such an act. Let the Shah kill him, but let him stay his hand from the blood of the innocent youth."

"Ahi, is it so?" said the mortified and disappointed king. "Is a slave, a base reptile like thee, to tell us what we are to do? Begone! we thought better of thy fidelity. Go!"

Upon this Sadek slowly and respectfully taking his leave, the Shah was left totally alone, to chew the cud of his reflections;

and bitter indeed they were, when he reflected that possibly he might be surrounded with disaffected servants. He determined himself to become a closer observer of the times than he had yet been, and as the public selam was always a ceremony in which the good or bad feeling towards himself might be detected, he determined that very day to make some experiments upon the temper of his courtiers.

When he came to his musnud at the usual noontide, casting his eyes about him he was surprised to find the court most thinly attended, the principal officers present being the chief executioner, his deputy, the chief of the tent pitchers, and two or three of the priesthood of Asterabad. He enquired for the prime Vizir, and found that he was absent owing to sickness. The general of his body guard had been called to an out-post, an alarm having been given of some approaching Turcomans; the chief of the *tuffenkchi's* was reviewing the troops; Shir Khan had fallen from his horse, and the *zamburekchi bashi* had been taken up in remodelling the corps under his charge. Several others were absent upon one pretext or another, and the ranks of his courtiers were filled up by inferior officers, *ketkhadas* of the town and governors of villages. Casting his eyes about, he perceived a poor wretch of a *ketkhoda*, who had been forced to appear, but who stood aloof, fearful of showing himself, because he wore neither *chakchurs*, the red cloth stockings, or a shawl to his cap. The Shah's rage was roused at being thus neglected, and when he perceived this man its whole violence broke out. Having been brought before him, he exclaimed: "Son of a dog! is it thus you dare to come before the Shah? Are we thus small, to be treated with less respect than an ass? Another time you will learn to come into our presence with a befitting dress." Upon which the ferashes were ordered to administer the bastinado upon the soles of his feet, whilst the Shah, brooding over the insult, which he thought was intentional, was confirmed in his suspicions, and soon broke up the court, in order the better to reflect upon the steps to be taken.

When restored to the solitude of his chamber, his conclusions led him to the certainty that disaffection prevailed, and that unless he struck some blow of consequence, his throne stood on the brink of a precipice. He pondered much upon Sadek's

conduct; for he argued, that if a worm like him had ventured to turn upon him, example of resistance must have been set by others. Drawing forth from under the pillow where he sat the *calemdîn* * usually deposited there, with a roll of paper, on a slip he entered a list of those whom he determined to destroy, at the head of which he inscribed the name of Sadek, adding his assistant the young Hussein, being determined to change those servants who were immediately about the person. He then inscribed others whose influence was prejudicial to him. Hajji Ibrahim, his vizir, he also added and then erased, as wishing still to acquire some further conviction of his disaffection. The prince's name was separate from the others.

Scarcely had he finished this, when Sadek, according to custom, opened the door and stood before him. Taken unawares, he hastily put his note under the pillow, and in doing this exhibited a confusion, which struck Sadek as an act so uncommon, that suspicions rose in his mind that something affecting himself was passing in the Shah's mind. At that moment the chief executioner also entered, and stood before the king. Although under other circumstances he would probably have been received with some offensive expression, yet now the Shah saw him appear with pleasure, for he felt that that officer's assistance would be of the first consequence, and he determined to treat him with kindness, in order to secure his co-operation. But aware how much he was controlled by his daughter Zulma, he thought proper to consult her, and accordingly ordered him immediately to announce to her that it was his intention to visit her on that very evening.

At about an hour before the evening prayer, he proceeded almost unattended to the harem. As soon as the king was seated, Zulma standing before him, he said,

“ You and your father, Zulma, of all my servants, are those upon whom the Shah places most dependence. Certain events have occurred in which we require all your devotion. We are not pleased with the services of some: it is necessary that they be put away.”

Zulma, whose ambition was roused by this confidential tone, humbled herself in proportion as she expected to be elevated,

* A small painted case containing pens and ink.

and made repeated assertions of her devotion to the Shah's commands, and of her own as well as of her father's readiness to execute all he should ordain.

"First," said the Shah, "it will be necessary to dispose of the prisoner Zohrab. To-morrow we ordain that he be exposed and humiliated in the eyes of the city, and then he dies."

"As I am your sacrifice," said Zulma, a pang darting involuntarily through her whole frame at this disclosure, "did not the asylum of the world say that he would defer punishment until Tehran—"

"If you, too, Zulma," said the Shah, his anger being roused at this contradiction, "if you thwart my wishes, the king's countenance will be turned from you for ever. Obey without a word, and the highest honours are preparing for you and your father. Refuse—and ye sink never to rise again."

Zulma was silenced, and, flattered by a disclosure which gave fresh impulse to her ambition, she submitted to smother every other feeling, and to become the instrument of the Shah's wishes.

"Hear, then," said the king. "The Shah will order thy father to exhibit the prisoner Zohrab to the city to-morrow: his humiliation shall be proportioned to his arrogance. Let the whole gang of ferashes and executioners be in readiness. Let him be mounted on an ass with the tail in his hand. A crier shall go before, exclaiming—'This is he who would be a king.' Ferashes and executioners shall spit in his face and buffet him, and others shall be invited to do the same. He shall then be impaled—and Allah have mercy on his soul!"

This horrid sentence visibly worked upon Zulma's feelings, and her tongue was on the point of interceding for the wretched victim; but in the mood she saw the king, she judged it wiser to refrain, and in silent acquiescence bowed her head before his orders.

"But," said the Shah, "ere this take place we have a more urgent call for thy obedience. Ere to-morrow's dawn another deed must be performed. Knowest thou Sadek?"

At this name, Zulma's whole attention was roused, for she was greatly jealous of the influence which Sadek exercised over the king, an influence which she never ceased devising some mode of lessening.

"Your slave knows full well who he is," said she; "whatever the Shah ordains, she is ready to obey."

"Thy father must use all caution in approaching him, and the deed must be done with secrecy. He must suspect nothing—he must attend upon our person to-night as usual, and to-morrow morning, ere the sun is on the horizon, he must sleep in the grave. Prepare thy father with thy council, and let the Shah be satisfied that his confidence in thee has been well placed. To-morrow we shall disclose more; but this is urgent, and any delay will bring upon thee the Shah's vengeance." Upon this he rose and departed, leaving the bewildered maiden in a state of such excitement, that she felt as if she herself had been elevated to the throne of Persia.

Whilst this was going on, Sadek had been greatly disturbed by suspicion and fear. The Shah's confusion at seeing him had struck his mind as so uncommon, that for a long while he sat in deep meditation, turning over the various causes which might have induced it. He saw that his own refusal to lend himself to the prince's death, had excited the king's anger, and as that was the first time in which he had ventured to disobey, it was to that circumstance he turned his whole thoughts. Full of conjecture, and anticipating the loss of the king's favour and of his situation near the person, he proceeded to the performance of his daily duty, that of preparing the king's carpet for evening prayer, with a heavy heart and a mind foreboding evil. He approached the spot which the king had so recently occupied, in order to refashion the cushion against which he rested. In turning it over, his eyes fell upon a slip of paper, the very slip which he had seen in the king's hand at the moment of his confusion, and which he had thrust under the cushion with so much haste. His natural curiosity would have led him to inspect it, had nothing intervened to make it an object of interest; but now he seized upon it with avidity. What was his surprise when the first word which struck his sight was his own name, written by the Shah's own hand. It stood at the head of a list, over which he quickly glanced; but so entirely was he taken up with his own name, that his eyes swam in his head from apprehension. Hussein's name, his fellow in office, stood immediately after his own. It soon recurred to him that upon a former

occasion, when the Shah had discovered a conspiracy, with his own hand he had made out a list of those to be put to death, and that he had adhered to the sentence, which he had then passed, with a resolution as fixed as destiny. Sadek was a man of courage, of great personal strength, and resolute of purpose. His mind was soon made up. Having remained for some minutes in an attitude so fixed that no statue ever stood firmer, he at length rose with the whole plan formed in his mind. He determined to save his own life and to slay the king. He argued thus : "God has given to each of us one life—more to a king he hath not given, than to the smallest reptile of the desert ;—why, then, should mine not be as valuable to me as the king's is to him ? Allah has directed me to this paper as to a beacon to ensure my safety. Sadek shall not turn back from this, happen what may." But few are the instances in which a man comes to a resolution of such importance without the support and encouragement of an accomplice, and as he felt great friendship for his youthful assistant Hussein, he determined to save his life in making him share the enterprise.

He quitted the Shah's apartments, after having prepared every thing for his accustomed evening prayer, and having carefully deposited the paper in the very spot in which he had found it. He then sought out Hussein, whose thoughts were taken up with any thing but the awful event which the more solemn Sadek held in contemplation. Luckily for the latter, nature had imprinted upon his features such unvarying sameness, that no one could discern that aught was working in his mind of more import than usual, and fortunate was it that such was the case; since, called upon as he would be to appear again before the king ere the perpetration of the deed, no suspicion would arise in the royal breast from the inspection of his looks.

"Come here, O boy," said Sadek to Hussein; "I have something to say which will drive all life from your head. Be serious and listen."

"If it be the report, now going about," said Hussein, "that Zohrab Khan, that unfortunate, is to be executed to-morrow, I have heard it."

"Zohrab Khan's death, indeed!" said Sadek; "what are you speaking of? look a little nearer home, and you will discover—"

"What say ye—home? You cannot be speaking of our prince, whom Allah take into his keeping!" said Hussein.

"Nearer still," said Sadek.

"In the name of the Prophet, what?" answered the alarmed youth.

Sadek then took him by the arm, and in the most impressive manner related the whole circumstance of the paper found under the cushion, having prefaced his communication by a description of the scenes which had taken place—first, of his refusal to murder the prince, then of the Shah's confusion at his sudden appearance.

The cheeks of the youthful auditor were blanched with fear as he heard the narrative; but when he was told that his own name stood second on the proscribed list, his knees knocked under him, and his teeth chattered in his head. He could scarcely gather any courage from the nerve of his companion; for it never had entered his mind that so desperate an action as killing a king could be conceived, much less executed, by a common thing called a man, and that man a slave. But when he witnessed the steady resolution of Sadek; when he heard his plan of attack, and saw how easily the deed might be done without danger to either, he slowly yielded his assent.

The hour of evening prayer was drawing nigh, and the moment of action was at hand. Sadek determined not to lose sight of Hussein for a moment, lest the timidity of youth might mar his scheme; and, above all, he was anxious to keep him from the presence of the king, certain, as he was, he could not preserve a proper steadiness of countenance, so necessary in the critical position of their affairs.

The Shah, having returned from his visit to Zulma, received as usual the several officers of state with whom business was to be transacted, and when Sadek appeared in his proper place, in the usual discharge of his office, the king spoke to him with a kindness of tone so totally new, that at once every suspicion was doubly confirmed, and he wanted no further proof to be certain that the king had signed his death-warrant. He was well versed in the treachery of his smile, and when kindness of tone and manner were superadded, nothing more was necessary to put him entirely on his guard.

The Shah, not seeing Hussein at his post, enquired where he

was, when Sadek asserted that he had the heart-ache (the usual mode in Persia of saying one is ill), which only called forth more expressions of kindness; upon hearing which the rough Sadek could scarcely prevent his unexpressive eye from casting a glance of contempt at the false-tongued tyrant. And when the hour of prayer was come, the exclamations of holy fervour which came from the Shah, were so much louder and so much more emphatic than usual, that upon any other occasion Sadek might have concluded that the heart of the king had been touched by the miseries inflicted upon the now prostrate city, and that apparently one so pious was devising nothing but good.

The day drew to its close; the usual watch was set on the walls and turrets of the Ark, and nothing took place which could in the least have made Sadek suspect that his own death was in contemplation, excepting one circumstance. This was the sight of a man prowling near the room in which he slept—a man he knew, who was never employed by the chief executioner excepting on desperate occasions. He could give no very good account of himself when questioned by Sadek; but his appearance gave the finishing stroke to his determination, and armed his hand with a nerve that nothing could shake.

The king retired to bed at the usual hour. The room in which he passed the night was admirably adapted to encourage Sadek in his undertaking. It was situated in a court, surrounded by high walls, separate from the great mass of the palace, and rather difficult of approach, the court being entered by a small gate which was barred at night. Sadek and Hussein slept in a *cufsh khaneh*, a smaller inner room, whilst a lamp was kept burning in the very room in which the king slept. The king could scarcely turn himself without being heard, and it was death if they disturbed his slumbers.

Whilst Sadek was performing the operation of taking off his garments, preparatory to bed, the king entered into conversation with him in a manner totally unusual; and with a kindness of tone, which perhaps might have softened any heart but Sadek's, said to him—

“ You have heard the fate of that ill-advised Zohrab; tomorrow will put an end to all his vain projects of ambition, and his death will seal the fate of his rebellion.”

“ As I am your sacrifice, yes,” said Sadek.

"What has become of thy sister, Sadek?" said the Shah. "We have lost sight of her."

"Your slave thinks that she fled to the Turcomans, with Zohrab Khan's mother," said Sadek.

"Ah! is it so?" said the Shah; "then it is well. We have ordered that that unfortunate woman should no longer be molested, and she may be permitted to sit under the shadow of our throne: the Shah wars not with women. Let thy sister partake of our clemency," said the king.

"May the shadow of the asylum of the universe never be less," said Sadek, quite alive to this extension of the royal forgiveness, and almost forgetting the desperate deed he was about to perform. "Your slave kisses the hem of your garment."

"Who is that?" said the Shah, giving ear to a noise which he heard at the gate of the court. "Who goes there?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said Sadek, "Hussein, your slave, is barring the gate."

"Go tell him to unbar it; be it left open to night; 'tis possible that reports may be made to the Shah of the state of the public mind preparatory to to-morrow's execution."

"Your slave then will sleep across the Shah's threshold," said Sadek, suppressing a look of ferocity which had lighted up his features, and again repossessed by his full determination, having heard this additional confirmation of the fate awarded him by his treacherous master.

"Do so," said the Shah. "Thou art a good servant: *in-shallah!* the king will make thy face white to eternity, and thy head touch the skies."

"Your slave is grateful for all the Shah's kindness," said Sadek; "but whose dog is he, that the Shah should take notice of him?" Upon saying which he managed to place the king's dagger and sword, which were usually close to his bed head, at some distance, which the king perceiving, suspicion lighting up his animated eye, exclaimed.

"Why do ye place them there, man? Why do ye change their position?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said Sadek, with infinite presence of mind, "when your slave sleeps upon your threshold, it is always the custom to change their position."

"Is it so?" said the king, apparently satisfied with the reason,

and allowed the change to be made. Nothing more being required, Sadek helped the king to his repose (the last before the grave!), and in taking his leave he fixed the lamp in a position favourable to his purpose, and took so accurate a survey of the relative situation of every object in the room, that he knew at once whither to direct his steps.

He then returned to Hussein, whose state of nervousness almost amounted to madness, so little prepared was he to be an actor in the tragedy. A small lamp burnt in their room, by the light of which Sadek, with a gloomy determination overspread-ing his features, inspected the fatal dagger (a long Georgian *khanjar* made of highest tempered steel), which was to seal the fate of the despot. Not daring to speak, scarcely to breathe, they communicated to each other by signs. They did not take off their clothes; both had prepared themselves for immediate flight as soon as the deed was over, and horses were ready saddled waiting for them at a moment's notice.

The hour of midnight, for which they had been watching with nervous expectation, at length was announced by the sentinels on the city walls, and then indeed their courage was put to the test. Sadek's rose in proportion as Hussein's fell. The youth was scarcely alive, still he kept as steady a countenance as he could, and looked at his dagger. Sadek arose, and trimmed the waning lamp, his face exhibiting to the timid Hussein features full of stern resolution. "*Biah, come! wakt shoud!* It is his time," said Sadek.

"One minute," said Hussein, his heart totally failing him. At that moment they heard an audible sigh from the Shah. "In the name of the Prophet, what's that?" said the youth.

"Come on," said Zadek fiercely, "otherwise thy heart shall feel this," brandishing his awful weapon in his face. He then led on, and slowly opening the door of the Shah's apartment, entered without making the least noise; but Hussein, in his excessive agitation, stumbled over the high threshold, and awoke the king.

"What's that?" exclaimed his shrill voice. "Who goes there?" After that he immediately rose, and seating himself upright in his bed, he perceived Sadek.

"Sadek!" roared he, "what do you seek?" and at once perceiving his intention, he exclaimed, "Stop! or ye die."

"Die yourself," said Sadek; "I come for thy blood ere thou takest mine."

"I'll give you all you ask," said the king, groping about for his arms. "I am your king! all ye desire, take."

"We want nothing but justice," said Sadek, "and this it is," upon which he aimed a deadly blow at the king, which he parried with his arm; the king then raised his voice, and seeking safety in flight around the room, he dodged his assassin with considerable dexterity. He had just seized his sword, when Sadek, watching his opportunity, plunged his dagger in the very inmost recesses of his heart. He fell, and as the stream of life flowed rapidly from the gaping wound, all he could articulate was, "I am the Shah—I—I—Shah—Shah—" And thus fell the scourge of Persia's fair kingdom, and of her soft and thoughtless sons.

At the sight of the breathless bloody corpse, Hussein actually sunk on the ground with dismay, and covered his face with his hands; whilst Sadek scarcely giving himself time to cast a thought on the vicissitudes which had thus destroyed one who swayed over millions, sat doggedly to work to complete his task. He first sought for the fatal list in the pockets of the Shah, which he found; he then calmly severed the head from the body, wrapped it in a napkin, and pinned the list thereupon; then taking it up in one hand, whilst he covered himself over with a cloak with the other, he left the apartment. Hussein followed him almost mechanically, scarcely knowing what he did. When they had quitted the palace, which they did unsuspected, being known to belong to the Shah, Sadek said to Hussein, "Now open thy eyes, say thanks to Allah for saving thy life, take to thy steed, and as ye would serve thy preserver, ride as if life and death depended upon thy exertions to the black tents of the Yamoot. Seek out Zohrab's mother, Mariam, the young Ali, and tell them to speed hitherwards with all haste. The Shah is dead, and Fatteh Ali reigns."

Hussein, now fully restored to his senses, did as he was ordered, and Sadek took his own road through the city.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

He arose one morning, and lo! he found himself a king.

VICISSITUDES OF HUMAN LIFE.

THE road from the apartments of the Shah, where the bloody deed had been committed, to the entrance gate of the palace, lay immediately in front of the small court and chamber in which the prince Fatteh Ali was confined. Of this Sadek possessed the key, and was the sole guardian. Passing it, his heart smote him when he thought upon the wretched and disconsolate situation of the youth, and it struck him that he might announce to him the change in his fortunes now about to take place, in a manner which would not compromise himself, but shorten the torments of the prince.

He therefore stept aside, and slowly opening the gate, he proceeded without making the least noise to the very door of the apartment where the prince lay.

Fatteh Ali was wrapt in a sound sleep, slight groans ever and anon breaking from his wretched bosom, when of a sudden he heard these words—"Fatteh Ali—Fatteh Ali—the Shah dies—thy sister lives—render thanks to Allah!" He awoke in a tremor, and seating himself upright on his mattress, he listened with all his ears, hoping to hear something more. He thought he heard a noise, and eagerly exclaimed—"Who goes there, in the name of the prophet?" but nobody answered. The silence which ensued was as profound as the darkness, and after much anxious thought and expectation, he resigned himself to his pillow again, and with a deep sigh concluded that he had been tantalized by some passing dream.

Sadek, in the meanwhile, made his way good through the gates of the palace and the Ark, and straightway sought the habitation of the Grand Vizir. It was a house that had belonged to one of the proscribed omrahs of the city, and as Sadek

was well known to be the Shah's confidential servant, who frequently was the bearer of messages at all hours of the night, he was freely permitted to pass on to where the Vizir slept. Here also he slowly entered the room, and depositing the horrible burthen which he bore, the bloody head, just within the threshold, he as quietly withdrew. No observation was made by the attendants—the night had still much to run, and the city was wrapt up in as much repose, as if peace reigned and crime was unknown.

Having thus fulfilled the measure of his awful destiny, this man of desperate resolution, and, though of crime, an avenger of his oppressed country, sought his steed, and taking his departure from the gates of the city, was soon lost in the darkness of the forest, never more to be seen among those who had long known him as their friend and companion.

At an earlier hour than usual, when the first glimmering of day was scarcely sufficient to pierce through the heavy curtain which covered the outside of the window of the Grand Vizir's room, the minister opened his eyes. He, too, thought that some unusual noise had taken place while he slept, and strange visions had passed through his brain, an event unusual to one who was well known for the soundness of his intellect. It appeared to him that something about the folds of the curtain of his door was different to what he remembered before he composed himself to sleep, and looking lower he saw a substance which, owing to the darkness, he could not define; but his eyes remaining fixed upon it, little by little he thought that it resolved itself into some well-known shape—that it resembled a human head! Then, with more certainty, he was almost sure that he could trace the eyes, then the nose, then the mouth; but as the certainty increased, he turned himself about, deriding his own credulity, and scouting the idea of so strange a vision. Again he looked and again he saw a head, and, what is more, the features assumed an expression well known; and ah! too horrible to think, he thought the Shah himself was staring at him. He covered himself over with the bed-clothes, as if to shake off so hideous a vision, and remained thus for some time, determining within himself to forget it; but now that the day dawned bright, and that he again cast his eyes that way, who can describe his looks of surprise and horror—who give an idea of the terror which

possessed him, when what he had imagined as a vision of the brain became a reality, and that the head which he imagined watching over the interests of the kingdom was a lifeless mass before him? He roared out to his attendants to appear, in a voice which to that hour they had never heard, and they rushed in to his assistance, expecting to have found him assailed by an assassin; but when their eyes caught a sight of the horrible and ghastly object, all their energies forsook them, and they stood as if they were paralyzed. Expressions of horror and amazement burst from both master and servants. "Who has done this?" cried one. "What ashes have fallen upon our heads?" said another. "The Shah is dead!" whispered a third, a thrill of joy running through his frame at the same time. "Have the *dives* and *gins* been at work this night?" said the Vizir; "but see, see, what is that paper? perhaps some news may enlighten our brain." Upon that one of the servants picked it up with great caution, and gave it his master.

"As I live," said the Vizir, "it is in the Shah's own hand!"

When he had well examined it, and particularly when he saw whose name was affixed at the top of the list, the mystery was cleared up, and immediately he understood the whole transaction. Strictly keeping his own council, he carefully put the paper into his breast, and having enquired whether any one had entered the house that night, none present could answer the question; but upon enquiry it was known at the gate that Sadek had, and had made a pretext of business with the minister.

The Vizir enjoined secrecy to every one present, and instantly dressing himself, mounted his horse, and proceeded to the palace. He found all the officers of the household at their posts, totally unconscious of the event, and although it was unusual to see the prime minister so early abroad, yet as their wayward master frequently transacted business at the most uncertain hours, they were in no manner surprised to see him, and freely admitted him. He had ordered the head to be brought after him, and accompanied only by its bearer, he fearfully entered the apartment in which the Shah had slept. We have dwelt too long upon horrors to aim at giving a description of the sight which struck the Vizir at his entrance. His was a mind deeply and impressively to reflect upon the vicissitudes of this

world's vanities, as he gazed upon the corpse of his late sovereign, whom but the night before he had quitted enjoying the fullness of his power, as unsuspicuous of the lot which awaited him, as were those whom he had himself doomed to a sudden and unprepared death.

The Vizir's first act was to take possession of the king's seals, which were carried in a small inner pocket, and then depositing the head near the body, he closed the doors, and directed a guard to be placed, until he should issue further orders. He then ordered a convocation of all the principal officers of state, of the chief priests and elders of the city, to meet in the great hall of audience of the palace, whilst he himself proceeded where the Prince was held in confinement.

It was still early in the day, and Fatteh Ali had scarcely performed his morning devotions, when the Vizir entered the room. He was seated most dejectedly on the corner of his carpet, ruminating over what he religiously believed to have been a dream, and started with surprise at seeing who his visitor was, at so unusual an hour.

"How is this?" said he, "our eyes are enlightened! My fortunes are on the rise, that my master should visit his pupil thus early."

He was still more surprised when he saw the Vizir approach with the same degree of respect that he observed to the Shah himself, and kneeling down at his feet touch the ground with his forehead.

"What mockery is this?" said the youth.

"May the hours of the king of kings be fortunate!" said the old man, affected even to tears, "Fatteh Ali Shah is now the sovereign of Irân. Thy uncle sleeps the sleep of the grave."

"Allah, Allah!" exclaimed the bewildered youth. "Is this still a dream, or am I indeed awake? What does this mean? Why come you thus to torture the unfortunate? If the king requires my life, take it—but do not add insult to my misery."

The Vizir then in a few words explained the catastrophe of his uncle's death, and in confirmation presented the paper containing the names of those, who but for this event would have been the victims of the tyrant's suspicions.

"Ah," said Fatteh Ali, his eye glancing over it, "in my

uncle's own hand!" He read it in silence, the colour forsaking his cheeks, as the various emotions which it excited filled his breast. He came to the name which had been inserted and then erased. "As I live," said the youth to the Vizir, "here is your name,"—and at the very termination, standing rather apart from the others, with a peculiar stroke under it, he found his own. "Allah, Allah!" said he in a solemn ejaculation, "the destinies of thy creatures are in thy hands! Vain, O man! are thy resolves, when the God of our creation has issued his own almighty decrees! But for this, and Fatteh Ali were numbered with the dead; but for this, and the angel of death would have visited him, and the recording angels made up the account of his life. And thou too, good old man! the loss of my life would have been of little consequence compared with thine, who by thy wisdom maketh millions of thy fellow-creatures to prosper. We must put up our thanks to God for this deliverance, and let this awful lesson make us both humbler and better."

Nothing could be more impressive than the words and manner of this young Prince, a worthy pupil of so excellent a minister, and he would long have indulged in the serious turn of his thoughts, had not Hajji Ibrahim reminded him that it was necessary he should attend the convocation about to assemble, to whom explanation of the sudden and awful event should be made, whilst he would be presented to them as their future sovereign.

It would be in vain to attempt to describe the various emotions which filled the breast of the young and ardent Prince, as left his place of confinement, and issued into the enjoyment of life, secure from the caprice of a tyrant, and possessor of one of the most brilliant thrones of Asia. The suddenness of the transition was almost too much for him to bear; his mind staggered to and fro, with the same unsteadiness and confusion of vision as that of a drunkard full of strong drink. But as he walked slowly onward, of a sudden he stopped, and exclaimed, "But in the name of the prophet, one half only of my nightly vision has been accomplished, what has become of the other half? I was told that my sister lived." He then related to his companion how he had been awakened, and recited the very words, which he now could swear had been uttered by a human voice. The Vizir suggested that the voice most probably was Sadek's, for

the whole circumstances of that man's career favoured that suggestion. His devotedness to the Shah, and at the same time his love for the Prince and his sister—his having been the supposed instrument of her death, as he had been that of their father's—his mysterious and reserved manner, and his honest and uncompromising severity of character—every thing led him to suppose as well as to hope that he might have pretended to execute the Shah's commands, at the same time that he might have saved the victims from their extreme rigour—and with this he concluded that time alone would work out the mystery which hung over Amima's fate, and that nothing that could be done could at all hasten its disclosure. Indeed, he issued immediate orders, that an active search should be made for Sadek, as well as Hussein; but when it was ascertained that they had early left the gates of the city, mounted upon the choicest of the king's horses, he felt that any attempt to overtake them would be in vain. But the hope, the lively and well-founded hope, which now animated the Prince, that his sister might be restored to him, gave such a buoyancy to his spirits, and so filled his heart with every sensation of joy and expectation, that he could scarcely give up his thoughts to the awful ceremony of taking upon him the reins of government which was awaiting him, and could think of nothing but becoming the protector and companion of his beloved Amima.

It was only at this moment that the image of the imprisoned and condemned Zohrab crossed the mind of the Grand Vizir. He would at that instant have run to throw open the gates of his prison, and to cast off his fetters; but it was necessary first to attend to his more urgent duty, and he promised himself the luxury of performing that act of justice as soon as he should have secured to his pupil the lawful throne of his inheritance, and gladdened the hearts of the oppressed country, by substituting, for the tyrant and the blood-drinker, one who promised to heal all their wounds, and to become their benefactor as he had become their king.

Already was the court of the great hall of audience filled, for an undefined report of the death of the Shah had early got abroad, and spread like the wind from one end of the city to the other; and already, in addition to the usual great officers of state, had the body of the Asterabad ullemah, headed by their

chief priests, collected themselves. The musnud alone was vacant, and the Grand Vizir not at his post. Every eye was turned towards the door through which the tyrant usually entered, and the assembled crowd could scarcely believe that he was not again to appear, when the curtain being thrown up, instead of that terror-inspiring face, that hard countenance full of deadly import, appeared the graceful form of the young Prince, full of youthful diffidence and modesty, attended by his aged and much revered minister. Every countenance brightened up; a low hum of joy and applause instinctively broke forth; when the Prince came forward, and presented himself to their joyful welcomes. Instead of seating himself at once on the musnud, he took his place at a lower spot, while the Vizir stood before him.

The Grand Vizir then addressed the Nakeeb Shah, one of the nobles to whom the late king usually spoke on public days, and informed him, in a full and detailed manner, of the death of Aga Mohammed Shah, making no comments, but using the reverential form of words common to oriental phraseology on such an occasion, and then stated that his nephew, Fatteh Ali, became his successor, both as the natural heir to the throne, as well as in virtue of the intention of the late king.

He then called upon the chief priest to ascend into the hall, in order to gird the sword of state on the king's person, as is usual on such occasions, until the ultimate and more solemn ceremony should be performed in the prescribed forms in the capital, by the *Mushteked* of the kingdom. This was done with all the proper acclamations; and the astrologer of the court having announced that a favourable conjunction of the planets was then taking place, nothing more was necessary to add to the universal joy. As soon as this ceremony was performed, and the king seated on the musnud, the *Fatreh* was chaunted forth in the usual manner by the finest voices at court, in which the titles of the new king were announced; and then public enthusiasm no longer being restrained, long and repeated shouts of joy resounded throughout the courts of the palace, and were re-echoed in succession from one end of the city to the other. And, indeed, what joy could be more sincere? The feeling was that of a reprieve from death—of the knocking off of the chains of a prisoner, or of the return of an exile to the enjoyments of home and

country. It was then that execration burst forth against the fallen king, that his name was branded with every odious epithet so prolific in the mouth and in the language of Persia, and that his successor's good qualities were extolled, as partaking of more than human excellence.

The shouts of joy which accompanied the installation of the new Shah, were heard with astonishment and apprehension by Zulma in the harem. She had scarcely closed her eyes during this celebrated night, so anxious had she been to put into execution the Shah's commands to superintend the death of Sadek, and she was waiting with the greatest impatience the return of the assassin to report the perpetration of the deed, when the noise of exultation struck her ears, and put her conjectures on the rack. "What can this mean?" said she. "Joy in the courts of the Shah! this cannot be! Such things are unknown; something has taken place!" She could scarcely refrain from running herself to the scene of action, so totally at a loss was she to account for what struck her ears. At length a knocking at the harem gate was heard, and the murderous wretch, who had received her orders in furtherance of the Shah's commands, and whom she expected to appear brandishing the head of her rival, returned all aghast at the change which had taken place. She at first would not credit the intelligence; she would have driven him away as a liar—as a coward excusing his pusillanimity; but her father soon confirmed all, and disclosed to her the destruction of every scheme of ambition which her too ardent imagination might have formed. She sat for some moments, uttering no other words than "The Shah is dead! the Shah is dead!" as if that one fact had never been placed among the possibilities of her future destinies, and then all her faculties appeared to be so stunned by disappointment, that she remained long absorbed in gloomy silence. Every dream, either of love or ambition, which had passed through her mind, seemed now so totally dissipated, and the realities of her situation appeared before her in such strong relief, that she could foresee nothing more brilliant for herself than resuming her former station of daughter of the chief executioner, the superintendent of ferashes, and the chief person among men of violence. But, in the middle of all this despondency a thought struck her, and she determined to act upon it instantly; she recollects that Zohrab was

still a prisoner, that she still might have access to him, and that perhaps she might yet secure a share in his affections, before she was again thrown back upon herself and her family. She accordingly hastened to put on her veil, and gave orders that the guardian of Zohrab's prison should attend her.

Some time elapsed ere this arrangement could take place, and she was about leaving the harem, when she was detained by observing a crowd of the royal servants and officers pursuing the very path which she intended to tread; and shortly after the young king himself, accompanied by the Grand Vizir, appeared surrounded by a brilliant cortege of courtiers, whose happy faces and easy carriage strongly spoke of the great change which had taken place. She retired within her apartments to ruminate over her miseries, whilst the procession passed on.

The ceremony of the temporary installation having terminated, the Grand Vizir did not lose a moment in bringing the situation of the prisoner Zohrab to the king's recollection, and requested his permission to go forthwith, and procure his release. Fatteh Ali, with all the warmth and enthusiasm of youth, acceded to the proposal with unfeigned joy, and moreover expressed a wish that he too might have the pleasure of seeing his fetters knocked off. Zohrab had in fact from his earliest boyhood been the idol of his admiration. His feats of daring and hardihood, like those of the heroes in the *Shahnameh*, had excited his emulation, whilst his acts of generosity and mildness had exalted him into the character of one of the mussulman's most revered Imams. Frequently had his imagination been enchanted by the supposititious loves of this brave youth and his sister, and to such a degree, that he had indulged his poetic vein (for which, in common with his countrymen, he was famous) by writing the loves of Amima and Zohrab, in imitation of those of Ferhad and Shireen. When he heard how deeply they were enamoured with each other, far from feeling any resentment or jealousy, their misfortunes, and the checks which were opposed to their love, only gave him more materials for weaving the thread of his romance, and now that he was called upon to act as the arbiter of their future destinies, it may be conceived with what delight he acceded to the Grand Vizir's proposal, and how eagerly he desired to become personally known to one who had so long held a share in his affections.

Zohrab, during the late events, had passed his time in dragging on a wretched existence, hourly expecting to be called upon to meet his fate. His fine features were scarcely to be recognized, his eyes, once so brilliant, were sunk and inanimate, his cheeks hollow, and his whole appearance was that of decay and desolation. He had perceived through one friendly chink in his cell, that another morning had dawned, and from what he had learned from his jailer had cheered himself with the hope that this day would see an end to his miseries. Upon the first approaches of the king's servants, hearing more voices than usual at the door of his prison, he concluded that his hour was at length come, and he redoubled those mental prayers for resignation to the divine will, which were usual to the habit of his mind, and by which he was enabled to meet the stroke which hung over him with fortitude. At length the gates were thrown open with a crash, and at once a crowd, brilliantly arrayed, accompanied by all the insignias of royalty, broke upon his astonished senses. His eyes were so dazzled by the combined glare of torches and daylight, that he was obliged to cover them for some time ere he could distinguish a single object; but before he had regained his sight, his fetters were knocked off, and he felt his person at liberty. Instead of the hoarse voice of the jailer, inviting him as he expected to attend his own execution, the first words spoken were in a kind tone by the Grand Vizir. They were as soothing to his senses as the promise of absolution to the desponding sinner, or as the calm of an opiate upon the nerves of a sleepless patient; they gradually prepared him to hear those good tidings which were about to bring renovation to his whole being, and to raise him from the grave to life—from utter despair to renewed hope.

It would be in vain to attempt to describe the gradations of feeling which took place in the mind of Zohrab, until he was put into complete possession of the change which had taken place in his fortunes. At first he could scarcely believe that he was to live, so fully had he prepared himself to die. But as he unravelled the consequences likely to ensue from the death of the Shah, and the accession of his successor, he began to place more value upon an existence to which he had become indifferent. When he was presented to Fatteh Ali, when he heard the kindness of his expressions towards him, and when he

reflected that it was no other than the brother of his Amima who thus addressed him, and who sought his friendship, his heart softened even to tears, and became alive to all the noblest emotions of his nature. Still, that great incentive to cling to life, the object of that love which had filled all the avenues to his heart, was wanting, and he heard with indifference from the king's lips, confirmed by the Vizir, of the honours, the dignities, and the worldly advantages that were in store for him. They both looked with the greatest interest upon the broken youth, as they observed the melancholy which seemed to pervade his whole being, and although they remarked that he strove to meet their kindness with corresponding alacrity and gratitude, still indifference to all that was said and promised preponderated. At length the sympathies of Fatteh Ali struck upon the right chord, and soon it occurred to him, that he might afford his new friend the same relief that he himself had enjoyed, by producing a corresponding hope in his breast. Ordering every one to retire, when he was left with Zohrab, he said, "I am quite aware of what is passing in your mind; mine was equally affected, but hear my tale, and let the same hope which fills me, rejoice you also." Upon that, he related what he had looked upon as a dream, but which he now could resolve into certainty, explaining the reasons why he was sure that it could have been none but Sadek who uttered the words which struck his ear. Zohrab immediately caught at the information with the same avidity that a drowning man, buffeted by a torrent, catches at a passing plank. His whole nature at once was changed. His eyes resumed their wonted brilliancy, smiles broke out on his haggard face, and as tears suffused his eyes, he threw himself at the knees of his young sovereign, and embraced them with the most unbounded gratitude and tenderness. Then indeed there was that quick interchange of affection and sentiments between the two youths, which settled their future friendship, and as there was generated a similarity of hope in their hearts, so their sympathies went hand and hand, and nothing more was wanting to ensure their happiness than the fulfilment of that assertion which had been so strangely pronounced on the eventful morning of the Shah's death.

Zohrab, in the course of a short time, was restored to health and to his usual good looks. It was not long ere he enjoyed the

delight of embracing his mother, of being restored to the services of his faithful Ali, and of communicating to Mariam the hopes of once more seeing her mistress. The young king, during the short time which it required to make preparations for leaving Asterabad to proceed to his capital, in co-operation with the Vizir and Zohrab, had done every thing in his power to relieve the unfortunate inhabitants who had suffered by the late siege ; and more particularly, had restored the house and fortunes of the fallen Zaul, giving back to his widow all his former possessions renovated and enriched, and making her every compensation, as far as worldly matters were concerned, for her recent losses.

Very soon after, the king, followed by Zohrab and his court and army, took their departure for Tehran, accompanied to a certain distance by the whole population of the city, who did not cease putting up prayers for the prosperity of their new king.

CONCLUSION.

“Aīham du lillah, tamam shād”—praise be to Allah, it is done !

THE PERSIAN'S GRACE.

We must now return to the desert, where Amima and her aged father had dragged on their existence in the tamest uniformity, no greater variety having taken place in the tenor of their life than might be produced by the change of seasons. Habit had rendered tolerable to him that which she could not but esteem the most horrid of exiles. Although she devoted herself entirely to him, attending upon his infirmities with assiduous care, and doing her utmost endeavours to soften his miseries, still she felt that she did not possess sufficient fortitude to look forward to an interminable exile in the desert, to passing her best years in a state of almost savage nature, the more so as her heart was fixed upon the image of one who, if he knew of her present forlorn

state, she was sure would undergo every danger and every sacrifice either to share it with her, or to tear her from it; besides which, the possibility of being left entirely to herself in this desolate solitude, would haunt her imagination even to madness. She might be bereft of her father. To whom, then, could she turn for protection? Buried in oblivion as they seemed to be, they might be neglected and forgotten even by the man who had saved their lives, and then what would be her fate, left to the mercies of rude and half savage rayats? Week after week, and month after month, dragged on, and nothing occurred which could make her suppose that her existence was known to any one. She saw none but her father, the young Ali Murad, and the old woman. She endeavoured to fortify herself with the consolations of religion, and in that her father was a great help and comfort. He could with pleasure give up life and its vanities, and even dreaded the idea of being restored to it; but this was not so easy for her, and excepting the one consolatory satisfaction of being of use and comfort to her father, she frequently regretted the compassion which her preserver had exercised in her favour, and wished that she had been added to the many victims of her uncle's vengeance.

It was her custom, at the close of day, to ascend the mound under which was situated their hut, and after having offered up her evening prayer, there to watch the gradual descent of the sun into the extended and unbroken horizon, her eyes passing over that long region of wilderness which she had crossed with such rapidity on the night of her arrival. She constantly turned her eyes and her thoughts in that direction, frequently indulging in the fond hope that perchance some kind being, hearing of her situation, might find his way to her, and make her recollect that she still belonged to the community of man; she often mistook some reed that thrust its head more prominently into the air than another, for a living being, and watched it with all the ardour of intense hope and expectation.

Often and often as her hopes had been disappointed, still she continued to gaze. It was at the close of an oppressive day, when the sultry south wind had blown with more than usual violence, accompanied by the most dispiriting howling, that Amima had taken post as usual on the hillock. The clouds threatened a stormy night, and long streaks of lightning were throwing un-

certain gleams over the bleak wilderness, when her eyes of a sudden fixed themselves upon a small black spot on the very verge of the horizon. She had too long been deceived by the deceitful appearances of the reeds, to mistake this for one, and as she had studied their bearings and distances, she was certain, on this occasion, she could not be mistaken, particularly as she remarked that it changed its position, sometimes disappearing altogether, at others re-appearing, whilst it increased in size at every moment. At first she imagined it to be an illusion, for frequently had she gazed and gazed until she could bring herself to believe she could see a whole army approaching; but still the object was there, a dark spot, changing place and increasing in size. At length she became quite certain that it was some live thing. Was it a wild beast—or a stray horse—or a lost camel? She conjectured that it might be any thing, save one of her own species. She did not venture to hope so much happiness. But still it approached, and there seemed intelligence in its action. It appeared to be making for the mound. At length, all doubt having vanished, the blood forsook her face, and trickled in cold channels through her veins, when her astonished and delighted eyes beheld distinctly a cavalier urging on his steed in a straight line to where she sat. Her step faltered as she rose to retreat, and her eyes were suffused by sudden dimness, until they were relieved by tears. As soon as she could walk, she hurried onwards to her home, and with great eagerness called to her father. "In the name of Allah," she said, "come, father, come!—a horseman speeds towards us from the west."

"How!" said the old man, with intense agitation; "is there one who knows how to find the broken Hussein?"

They had scarcely said these words, when the unusual sounds of horse's hoofs confirmed Amima's words, and were heard trampling towards the door of the hut. The youth, Ali Murad, rushed out to see who it might be, and soon the stern and hollow voice of a stranger was heard.

"Where is the Khan?—Where is the lady banou?" said the voice.

The boy led the stranger in. He was a tall figure, his dress greatly weatherworn and dusted, and he was armed at all points. The last gleams of day scarcely glanced into the dark room, and there was difficulty in distinguishing his features.

The stranger's first impulse was to rush towards the old Khan, to seize his hand, kiss his knee, and then bow himself before Amima, exclaiming at the same time, "*Selam alekum*, peace be unto you!"

"That is Sadek's voice," said the blind prince, "as I live, that is the voice of an old servant."

"Allah preserve us," exclaimed Amima, as she looked upon him, "it is indeed Sadek! Welcome to you—welcome, Sadek Beg—long have we expected you—what news? Sit."

Her agitation strongly manifested itself as she spoke, tears trembling in her eyes, and the nervousness of tears giving agitation to her voice.

The feeling was communicated to the rough man, before her, and he could scarcely speak, from the variety of sensations which at once pervaded his breast. Assassin of his king, he became the saviour of the beings before him. He was voluntarily throwing himself into exile, when at the same time he restored them to the world, its delights, and its honours.

"The news I bring," said he, "is this: the Shah is dead—Fatteh Ali reigns—and Zohrab lives. I come to conduct thee to Tehran."

It would be impossible to describe the varied feelings which overwhelmed at once both father and daughter, upon hearing these words. She threw herself into his arms and sobbed aloud, whilst he pressed her to his heart, and in solemn and reverential tones invoked the awful name of his creator, the author and the disposer of all things. Long did it take to restore their minds to the control of reason. The old man, although he rejoiced for the safety of his daughter and son, shrunk from the new habits which he was called upon to adopt, whilst the lovely Amima blushed through all her frame, as her thoughts dwelt almost exclusively upon that one absorbing object of her heart, her lover, and rapidly ran over all the happiness in store for her. They scarcely enquired how such strange events had come to pass, so totally were they engrossed with the results; and allowed some time to elapse ere they called upon Sadek to relate the different events that had occurred since he had last visited the desert. We must leave them for a while to exhaust their curiosity and make the preparations for their journey, in order to describe the entrance of the young king into his capital.

Long indeed was it since Tehran had seen so happy a day, or Persia been cheered by such happy prospects, as when Fatteh Ali Shah entered its gates. The arrangements made for his reception were on the most magnificent scale. The whole country seemed with one consent to put on a new dress, and as the court poet expressed it, "Nature had thrown off the sack-cloth and ashes of oppression, to put on the kalaat of happiness." Every where men were seen congratulating each other, bandying their *mubarek bads* from family to family. Every head that could turn a stanza was busy in making the "nightingale of the pen flutter about the new-blown rose of royalty." Astrologers were taken up in drawing the horoscope of the new king, predicting his greatness, and establishing his perfections. The priests composed new blessings for his special purpose, and new curses for his enemies—and from that day every one began to form some project for future years, in the hope of being able to put it into practice, a satisfaction unknown during the reign of the late king, for it was looked upon as presumption and imprudence to lay a plan for the next day.

Upon the morning of the young king's entrance into the city, the whole male population in new clothes turned out to meet him, many of the most zealous proceeding several parasangs on the road, to catch the first glimpse of his person, whilst the women in their white veils lined the walls. At intervals oxen were sacrificed on his road, and according to ancient custom their heads were thrown under his horses' feet. Sugar, that emblem of prosperity in a Persian's estimation, was spread on the road in profusion; a numerous band of wrestlers, wielders of clubs, of *lutis* or merry-andrews, and bear and monkey leaders, were in readiness to leap, dance, sing, and beat their drums in his honour; the longest *pai endaz* that had ever been spread, composed of the richest and most costly stuffs, reaching from the threshold of the city gate to the foot of the throne, was prepared for his horse to walk over; the most noisy *nokara* that had ever shaken the walls and stunned the people of Tehran, was seated in high places, ready to strike up the instant he appeared, and at night the blaze of illuminations was such as to put the heavens to the blush, and make the moon and stars hide their diminished heads.

When at length he did appear, surrounded by his brilliant

cortege, the shouts that rent the air, as the same poet said, "were reverberated in long and deep echoes at the bottom of every Persian heart, and passing from earth to Jehanum, were again repeated for a hundred years about the soul of the dead tyrant, forming as great a part of his punishment there, as they afforded pleasure to Persia."

Every one was struck with the beauty of the young Shah, of his grace, his inimitable attractive manner, and the felicity of his expressions, as he presented the emblematic sugar to each congratulating noble. All were happy to behold their favourite Grand Vizir among them again. "But who," said they, "is the youth who rides on the right of the king? Who ever before saw so noble a countenance, so Rustam a form, and such a charm of appearance? As soon as they knew him to be Zohrab, the great and celebrated Zohrab, all others were neglected to gaze upon him, and never had Tehran seen a sight in every way so agreeable—a young and beloved king, a wise vizir to direct his councils, and an invincible warrior to guard his throne.

The cavalcade proceeded with great dignity, amidst the joyful cries and happy faces of the multitude. The king crossed the threshold of the city at the proper hour prescribed by the astrologer in chief, and seated himself upon the throne, amidst the roar of cannon, the din of the *nokara*, and the prayers of the assembled *ullemah*.

The next day was appointed for the formal investiture of the sword of state by the *mushched*, who had come expressly from Kom, his usual seat, for that purpose, as well as to bind on the armlets of royalty, and to present the crown.

The day came with all its solemnities. The great court, situated before the open hall, supported by columns, in which was placed the marble throne, was early crowded by the principal officers of state in their most brilliant brocades, arms, and jewels; every avenue to the palace was lined by troops; the *zambureh* camels, with their gaudiest trappings, were placed in long rows in the maidan; the elephants were astonishing the crowd, their rich *howdars* glittering with mirrors and trappings of cloth of gold. The whole city was gathered in and about the palace at noon; when the young king appeared staggering under the splendour of his dress, covered with jewels of such

astonishing value that every other sovereign might blush for poverty. The *mushched*, an old man of dervish-like appearance, his white beard sweeping his breast, was brought forward, together with a brilliant sword, which he buckled on the side of the king, uttering a prayer for its success. The armlets, the celebrated *koh noor* and *deriah noor*, were then fastened on his arms, and the crown placed upon his head; and then, when fairly seated on his throne, the *Fatreh* was pronounced, and the ceremony concluded by the din of artillery and the shouts of the multitude, which told the city and Persia that they now possessed a king installed with every due formality.

During the ceremony, Zohrab, in the dress of a soldier, stood on one side of the throne, and the Grand Vizir on the other. The shouts of joy were still ringing through the air, when a sensation of stir and curiosity was felt throughout the assembled courtiers, by the appearance of an old blind man, leaning on a staff, slowly making his way through the crowd, conducted by a youth of lowly appearance, and followed by a female who, though closely veiled, exhibited the most beautiful and attractive form. This little group was allowed to proceed, headed by an officer of the household, who with a voice of authority ordered a passage to be cleared. It gradually made its way to the throne. The sensation it produced became stronger and stronger at every moment. Some of the older soldiers and attendants recognised the once famous Hussein Kûli Khan in the stranger, and ran to kiss the skirt of his garment. The cry of "Hussein Kûli Khan,—the king's father,—Aga Mahomed's brother!" rose little by little, and at length struck the ear of the Grand Vizir. The young king soon caught the sounds; Zohrab's eye fell at once upon a form too strongly imprinted upon his memory ever to be forgotten; and almost with one consent they jointly hastened towards them. "My father, my father!" cried Fatteh Ali, and his brilliant and graceful figure was seen to rush forward, and fall upon the old man's neck, with all the ecstasy of filial love.

It would be in vain to describe what followed; for having now brought our hero and heroine together in this auspicious manner, who shall again venture to separate them? Never was happiness equal to theirs! The feelings of joy which overwhelmed Amima, when at the same moment she embraced her brother,

saw her lover, and was protected by her father, are such as few heroines enjoy. Moreover, as soon as she returned to her rooms in the harem, she was greeted not only by her faithful Mariam, but by all the birds of her groves, which had so long been deprived of her presence.

The nuptials of Zohrab and Amima were soon after celebrated in a style of magnificence that had long been unknown in Persia: and we need not say that never was a couple so blessed or so happy.

We grieve, however, to throw a cloud over this picture of unmixed joy, by exhibiting the looks of woe, of disappointed ambition, and of concentrated rage, which appeared upon the countenance of the forgotten Zulma. She long had been smarting under the prospects of prosperity which cheered the rest of her countrymen. She foresaw that her reign was over; and such was now the universal joy and consequent absence of punishment, that she felt that neither her's nor her father's office would enjoy the same consideration which it did in the preceding reign, and that their employment was gone. She frequently turned her mind from one scheme of ambition to another; at length, finding that every other project failed, she determined on marrying Shir Khan, and there, it is said, she succeeded to her heart's content; for although he daily assured her that no man in the world was like him, and that he had a peculiar way of being different to every one else, known only to himself, she did not cease as regularly to administer a daily dose of her slipper on his mouth, accompanied with variations by pulls at his curls and clutches on his beard.

Sadek having deposited his precious charges at the gate of Tehran, quitted Persia for ever, passed the rest of his life in his native village in Georgia, secretly cherished and befriended by the new king; whilst Hussein returned to a post about the person. A general pardon was pronounced to all who had been called offenders, or who for crimes real or imaginary had been confined by the late king, and the new rule began by a series of peaceful and quiet years, which have been perpetuated by a longer reign than Persia has almost ever known.









